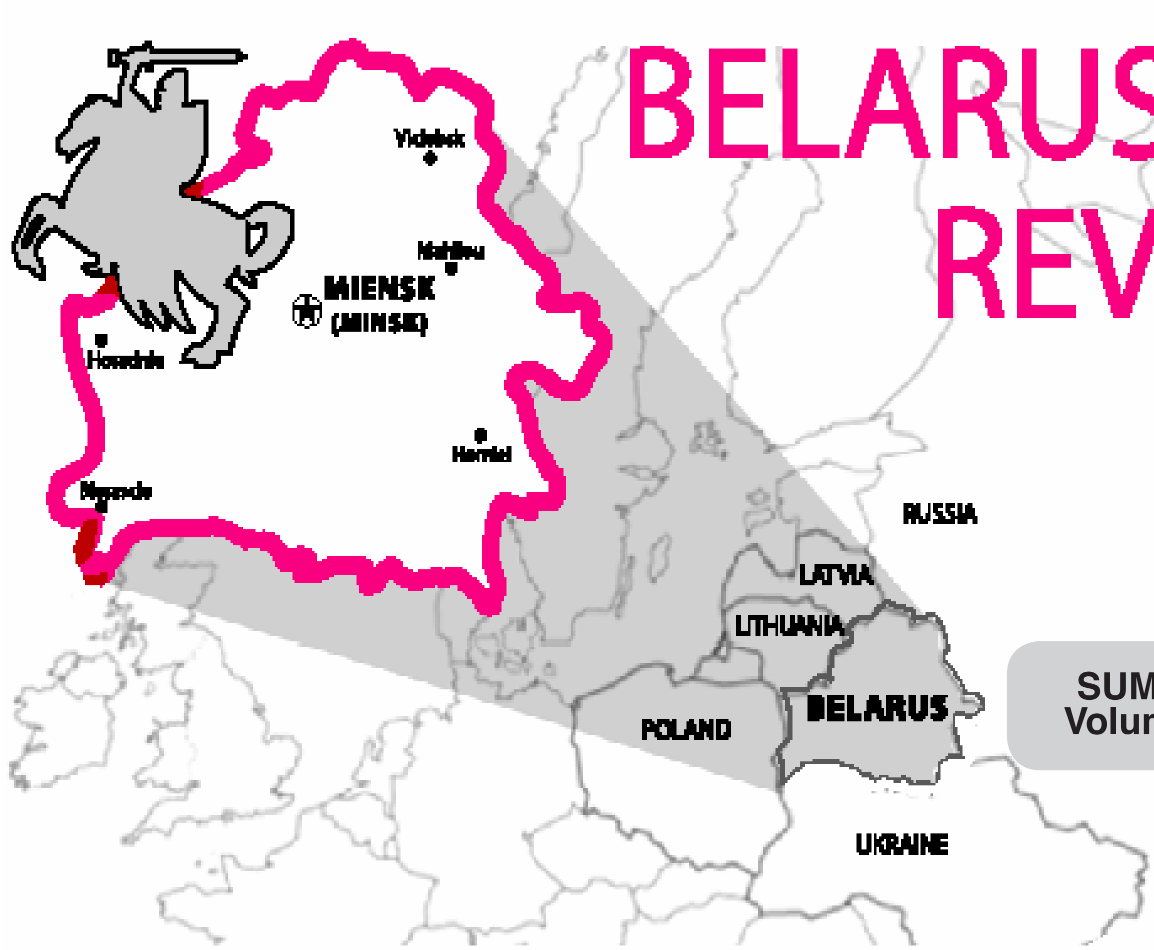
BELARUSIAN REVIEW



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In this issue

EDITORIAL

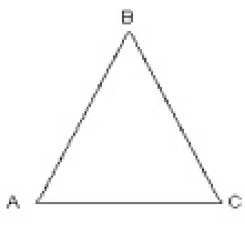
Simple Mathematics

By Kirył Kaścian

I remember a math problem from my school years: how much time would it take Z to get from point A to point C, traveling through point B. This was quite a simple task but one has to correctly consider the conditions given in order to get the proper answer. In other words, the correct answer depends on the configuration of points A, B, and C, the speed and other characteristics of Z, as well as other relevant factors.

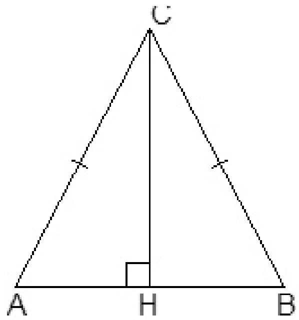
This association comes to mind when I see texts on the geopolitical choices of Belarus, attempting to discuss the apparent preferences of the Belarusian population and measure capacities of pro-European sentiments in Belarus. All these studies are based on the traditional public opinion poll that has been produced by the IISEPS for at least eight years. The question of this poll is formulated as follows: "If you had to choose between integration with Russia and joining the European Union, what choice would you make?" This question has three possible answers – integration with Russia, joining the EU, and don't know/no answer. Accordingly, the apparent respondent is being pushed to make a choice between Russia and the EU. The third variant of the possible answer – don't know/no answer – rather implies that the apparent respondent is either unaware of her/his preferences or is not ready to make a choice. It all seems convincing and creates an apparently solid basis for further analyses, but is it really so and how relevant is the school mathematics course in this case?

In order to verify the apparent solidness of the poll, let us try analyzing this opinion poll and its answers from a mathematical perspective. Let us imagine that Z is Belarus in the eyes of any participating respondents and B is the current place of Belarus in her/his eyes. A and C are then Russia and the EU, respectively. The variants of the answers provide quite a settled framework so that we can place it into an isosceles triangle (see the graph below).



Let us look at the options offered to Z within the conditions of the opinion poll. If Z doesn't know or has no answer, he/she remains at point B. If he/she prefers Russia or the EU, he/she moves accordingly to A or C. Since Z is pushed to choose between A and C, i.e. between Russia or the EU, he/she has to follow an imaginary path which in each case is equal in length which explains why a triangle in the scheme is isosceles. Thus, the formula implies a simple choice "either/or" between two options (Russia and the EU) provided with equal characteristics. Moreover, acceptance of one option means exclusion of the other. However, such conditions are available rather in a laboratory vacuum but not in real life. In order to prove that, two scenarios would have to be available, one of which is in a vacuum while the other one is real.

The framework for this scenario is the same as in the initial opinion poll, i.e. B is the current place of Belarus in the eyes of a respondent, while A is Russia and C is the EU. It seems that an attempt to push a respondent to choose between Russia and the EU is based on the premise of Belarus' location between these two global players. But what if one introduces an additional variant of the answer, i.e. keeping neutrality in a Swiss or Norwegian manner? This variant comes along the above mentioned logic of the opinion poll's initiators and rather provides an additional scenario: how can Belarus could act being between these two players. Moreover, this and only one additional variant seems sufficient, since any other model of development (Singapore, Israel, Venezuela, or any other state) seems irrelevant as it does not fit the realities of Belarus' geopolitical location. Thus, we can place this scenario into an isosceles triangle (see the graph below).



So, if Z doesn't know or has no answer, he/she remains at point B. If he/she prefers Russia or the EU, he/she moves accordingly to A or C. But if Z states that he/she opts for keeping neutrality in a Swiss or Norwegian manner, then he/she moves to H. The choice of a location H is based on the assumption of the above-mentioned neutrality . In any case, it means that if Z makes this choice, the distance between Belarus and Russia on one hand and Belarus and the EU on the other hand, remains equal. Moreover, this answer does not imply a simple choice "either/or" between two options as in the initial opinion poll and does not mean the exclusion of other options. In other words, such a choice implies good neighborliness with both the EU and Russia so that Belarus can balance between these actors, pursuing its own interests — at least to some extent. Moreover, such an option enables Belarus to act as a subject of politics but not as its object as implied by the set of answers to the initial opinion poll. It seems also that the realization of this scenario is based purely on the fact of Belarus' location between the EU and Russia, and it does not seem relevant whether the country is led by Lukašenka or someone else. It is also quite clear that the existence of this "neutrality" option would and probably considerably change the results of the opinion polls on the geopolitical preferences of Belarusians.

Now let's leave the laboratory vacuum and return to reality. The political relations between Belarus and Rus-

sia are largely determined by the same political culture of the Belarusian and Russian leaderships, which makes it easier for them to understand each other's needs and put up a brave front even when it seems that hardly any solution may be found. Moreover, the enormous presence of Russian media and mass culture in Belarus brings the Russian option closer to Belarusian society. Additionally, the actual absence of border controls between the two countries provides Belarusians with opportunities to see Russia with their own eyes without complicated bureaucratic procedures. Finally, the integration processes — either virtual or real — between Belarus and Russia are taking place in political, economic, military and other dimensions. Allegorically speaking, these factors bring Russia to the minds of ordinary Belarusians and work for their pro-Russian choice when asked to choose either Russia or the EU.

As far as the EU is concerned, the very option of "joining the EU" as formulated in the opinion poll remains rather imaginary even for such countries as Georgia or Ukraine who declared it as one of their aspired political goals. Additionally, as a result of the Belarus-EU political antagonism, the Belarusian pro-EU civic society remains subject to repression and is used as scapegoat for the regime's political propaganda. Finally, quite complicated bureaucratic visa procedures do not contribute to a massive discovery of EU by ordinary Belarusians. Even though the EU option might be attractive for a considerable part of the Belarusian population, it is not on the political agenda either in Belarus or the EU; it is questionable whether this issue would be raised at all in the mid-term future.

In other words, the opinion poll on the geopolitical choice of Belarus compares the real integration with Russia which is ready to work here and now, with the virtual process of Belarus joining the EU which might occur sometime in the future, if at all , if the EU were to decide that Belarus deserves to become a new member. And this reality is somewhat difficult to explain with mathematics. If we imagine this as a triangle, it will definitely be deformed by the different conditions described above; it is questionable whether this deformation is reversible.

Thus, it seems that all these opinion polls on the geopolitical choice of Belarus as well as texts based based on them, intending to measure capacities of pro-European sentiments in Belarus seem to be at least very questionable since they try to compare **two issues: a real and a virtual one.** And the virtuality of the latter is only indirectly related to the Lukašenka regime. The experience of the EaP countries most advanced in their integration process with the EU has not been positive; none of the relevant EU documents have so far clearly indicated these countries' prospective membership in the Union. In other words, even if the political regime in Belarus were to change, the issue of the country's accession to the EU would remain virtual at least in the mid-term future.

From the Publisher

The Matching Funds Project is ON!

Belarusian Review thanks the following initial donors, and appeals to other loyal supporters to join them:

Lamont and Olga Wilson
George Stankevich
Jan Zaprudnik
Walter and Joanne Stankievich
……………………………………

Other supporters, interested in the BR's future, are encouraged to join this project by declaring a one-time larger sum that would cover up to 50% of the annual budget's shortfall.

.Such a contribution of $3,000 -- $5,000 could be specified in the contributor's last will, or gifted in one lump sum, or prorated over five or ten years.

FEATURES

Concept of this Issue

By Hanna Vasilevich, Kirył Kaścian

The last census in Belarus showed that the country's total population has decreased to 9.5 million while the proportion of ethnic Belarusians has increased and has reached 83.7%.

Along with observing these trends it is being widely discussed that the Belarusian national culture is degrading, the Belarusian language is being increasingly less used by the population, the russification policies by the country's authorities are increasing, and the state's measures to support Belarusian culture and language remain at least insufficient to preserve even the current state of the national culture and language.

While not discussing these views one should admit that a considerable number of ethnic Belarusians live outside the borders of their native ethnic state. The origins of these Belarusian communities are varied – they may constitute traditional indigenous minorities, traditional diasporas established long ago or new communities maintained by economic migrants. All these communities preserve and develop Belarusian culture, at least to a certain extent. And while living outside the country they constitute an unalienable part of Belarusian culture and should be treated with respect. In neighboring countries (Latvia, Lithuania, or Poland) Belarusians constitute traditional indigenous minorities and their emergence is a result of numerous state and administrative border shifts in the 20th century. Significant diaspora communities exist in the USA, Canada, the UK, Germany or the Czech Republic – they are quite diverse by their origins but they contribute to maintenance and promotion of the Belarusian culture in their countries of residence. How-

ever, it might be observed that the level of cooperation between the native ethnic state and the Belarusian communities is still far from being satisfactory. Traditional Belarusian indigenous minorities in the neighboring countries maintain certain contacts with the Belarusian state, but this often does not apply to Belarusian diasporas in other countries. Often, due to various reasons (administrative, financial, communicative, organizational, etc.) the potential of many people in promoting Belarusian language and culture in the world cannot be fully realized, despite their considerable capabilities.

At the same time almost every organized ethnic group in Belarus has opportunity to promote its culture within the borders of Belarus with the support of the Belarusian state. The last festival of national cultures that took place in Hrodna in June 2012 showed this trend – 33 ethnic groups were represented there, including such, for Belarus exotic communities as Venezuelans, Spaniards, Koreans, or Hindus.

This issue of **Belarusian Review** focuses on the Belarusian communities abroad as well as ethnic communities in Belarus.

In his exclusive interview for Belarusian Review **Boriss Cilevičs** – member of the Saeima (Parliament) of Latvia and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – provides his assessment of the situation of ethnic minorities in Belarus, discusses what elements of the CoE minority-related legal framework may be implemented by the Belarusian legislation, and describes the situation of ethnic minorities in Latvia.

Waldemar Tomaszewski (Valdemar Tomaševski) — member of the European Parliament, representing the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania — in his comment for our journal evaluates the current policy of the Lithuanian state concerning ethnic minorities, cooperation among these minorities, and the situation of the Belarusian minority in Lithuania.

In his article "I don't know how many Belarusians there are in Poland" **Prof. Dr. Jaŭhien Miranovič (Eugeniusz Mironowicz)**, a prominent member of the Belarusian minority in Poland, discusses the unofficial results of the country's 2011 population census announced by the Poland's Central Statistical in the beginning of March 2012.

In his interview for *Belarusian Review,* **Father Aliaksandar Nadsan**, a legendary figure of the Belarusian diaspora in the UK, discusses issues of national identity, religion, and language in the contemporary Belarusian society. He also describes relations between the Belarusian diaspora and its countries of residence, referring to the example of Belarusians in the UK.

A book by A. Rosenberg "Essays on the Jewish History of Towns and Shtetls of Belarus" is comprehensively reviewed by **Prof. Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky** who admits that since "Judaica has thus far been absent as an independent trend of historical research in independent Belarus, Rosenberg's book has become a kind of "popular reply" to this glaring injustice."

Additionally to the minority/diaspora-related issues, this issue of *Belarusian Review* offers a number of topics.

In his editorial "Simple Mathematics" **Kirył Kaścian** discusses the accuracy and credibility of opinion polls on the geopolitical choice of Belarus as well as of texts based based on them.

Stefan Liebich who represents the Left Party (Die Linke) in the German Bundestag's Committee on Foreign Affairs provides his view on the current developments of Belarus-EU relations and Germany's role in it.

Pavel Usov in his article "Church and Politics in Belarus" analyses the role and capacity of the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches in their interaction with the state as well as in processes taking place in Belarusian society.

The text "Will the 'Optimization' of Belarusian History Become a Guarantee of Honesty and Patriotism in Educating New Generations?" represents assessments of the current situation in Belarusian history instruction by four authoritative Belarusian historians – **Siarhiej Novikaŭ**, **Hienadź Sahanovič**, **Aleś SmalianČuk** and **Zachar Šybieka**, who represent different spheres of the study of Belarusian history.

Boriss Cilevičs: I wish that Belarusians Don't Lose their Diversity which Makes Belarus Able of Understanding Both the West and the East

The personality of Boriss Cilevičs does not need an additional introduction when it comes to the national minority issues. Since 1998 he is a member of the Saeima (Parliament) of Latvia. Since 1999 Mr. Cilevičs is an active member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in particular, he was elected first chair of the PACE Sub-Committee on Rights of Minorities (2005-2007).

In his exclusive interview for "Belarusian Review" Mr. Cilevičs provides his assessment of the situation of the national minorities in Belarus, discusses what elements of the CoE minority-related legal framework may be implemented into the Belarusian legislation, and describes the situation of national minorities in Latvia.

Belarusian Review: *How do you assess the current definition of "national minority" in Belarus?*

Boriss Cilevičs: I believe this de facto definition is quite inclusive and rather broad. As for the possible dispute about the need to establish any additional criteria, I consistently agree with those who say it is primarily the matter of identity and if someone claims the belonging to a minority we should be very cautious to question this personal choice. As the Permanent Court of International Justice stated as early as 1930, the existence of a minority is a matter of fact, not a question of law. So, I believe that if some persons claim that they are of minority kin we should hardly reconsider this. What makes me cautious regarding the Belarusian situation is certain confusion between the notions of "national minority" on the one hand and an organisation representing this minority

on the other hand. This might trigger some controversies, in particular, if several organisations are established by persons belonging to a certain minority, i.e. this raises the question who is the real representative of this minority. This situation is typical for many European countries where a state is generous enough to financially support cultural activities of minority NGOs. Another issue to be considered is the fact that Belarusian legislation stipulates the minority organisations can be established only by citizens of the Republic of Belarus. I do not believe that such restriction is necessary. I follow the position of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities that always emphasises that any state does have a legitimate right to define which groups are considered as national minorities within the territory of this state, but this choice should not be arbitrary and under no circumstances should be discriminatory. I believe the more inclusive approach the state implements the better.

BR: *What are the lessons of Latvia and the CoE minority-related legal framework (if any) that may be adopted into the Belarusian legislation?*

BC: The European experiences is very diverse – there are cases of best practices and also some huge mistakes and abuses. I think it is difficult to learn from someone else mistakes as humans if at all tend to learn from their own mistakes and states seem to follow this path as well. What is important is not to lose the level of diversity which in Belarus is very high. And, as far as I understand, in terms of their cultural identity the persons who belong to the ethnic majority, i.e. ethnic Belarusians are also very diverse. The degree of personal multilingualism and multiculturalism is very high. Of course, for nationalists diversity is always a threat. But I am highly convinced that it is first of all a strong asset even though it brings a challenge which is not always easy to handle. What I would really like to wish Belarusians is to preserve and strengthen their national identity, the common identity of the entire people and at the same time not to lose their diversity which makes Belarus open and able to understand both the West and the East what is extremely important for the future. I believe that Belarus needs Europe and Europe needs Belarus. In the Council of Europe we miss this big European country in order to make the CoE a really pan-European organisation. Even though there are many obstacles on both sides, we should be cautious in blaming each other. I believe the day will come when Belarus becomes a full-fledged part of the united Europe. Belarus to a considerable extent implements in practice what we are talking about in the European Union – unity in diversity. Thus, it is very important to preserve these both components.

BR: *How do you evaluate the situation of national minorities in Latvia?*

BC: Generally Latvia is considered a success story in terms of minorities accommodation. I agree with this opinion to a limited extent. Our main achievement is that we managed to avoid any violence although many experts in conflict prevention predicted quite sad future for Latvia on the basis of purely formal criteria – ethnic proportions, language capacities, historical events, etc. But it appears that stability and peace are high priorities for the all involved groups. This is a great asset that we do not have history of violent conflicts unlike some other European states. On the other hand, we still have very serious problems with fair implementation of the Framework convention's provisions, particularly in the area of language legislation and ensuring effective participation, as well as full and effective equality of the persons belonging to minorities. These issues were seriously addressed but not resolved during the pre-accession negotiations. I think this period of political conditionality prior to the country's accession to the pan-European organisations ended too early for us. In fact, the main goal of this pre-accession political conditionality is not to make country meet formal legal and political criteria, but to achieve the situation that political elites of the country are able independently and without external guidance to take decisions that correspond to these written and unwritten criteria. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved, that is why the serious progress made before the accession stopped and has even been reversed. As a result, some recent trends show that tensions in the society are growing. The criticism expressed by the Advisory Commission in particular areas is flatly rejected. I believe this is one of the reasons why emigration from Latvia is continuing. I very much hope that we have a potential to overcome these problems but we will have to work hard to do it.

Interview conducted by Hanna Vasilevich

Waldemar Tomaszewski: Together in Defense Of Common Rights

Belarusians are the third most numerous national minority in Lithuania, comprising 1.1% of the country's population. Like Poles, Lithuania's Belarusians are an indigenous population, that has been living in the Vilnia region for centuries. The current national minority situation has elicited sharp debates in the Lithuanian society.

Belarusian Review has asked Waldemar Tomaszewski — member of European Parliament, representing the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania — to evaluate the current policy of the Lithuanian state concerning national minorities, cooperation among the national minorities, and the situation of the Belarusian minority in Lithuania.

Waldemar Tomaszewski:: "Unfortunately, in recent-years the last years the government's policy concerning Lithuania's national minorities has deteriorated. First of all, the Law on National Minorities, in power since 1991, expired on January 1, 2010. As a result of annulling this law Lithuania's authorities have denied national minorities the previously guaranteed right for the public use of their native languages as local languages, along with Lithuanian, in areas with dense minoritz population

Moreover, despite the fact that over 60,000 Lithuanian citizens have signed an appeal, asking the politicians to avoid making onesided legislative decisions, on March

17, 2011 the parliament has voted for an amendment to the Law on Education that discriminates against students of national minority schools. Among others, this amendment introduced the following:

- instruction of individual subjects in minority schools in a non-native language.

- unification of high school graduation exams from the country's official language in minority schools and Lithuanian-language schools — to be implemented already within two years, despite the existing radical differences in instruction programs, as well as in the number of instruction hours of the official language in the mentioned educational institutions.

- In areas, where a minority school exists next to an institution with instruction in the official language , and neither school satisfies the numerical criteria concerning the number of students, the local self-government organs have are supposed to preserve only the school with the official-language instruction.

In addition, the rights of citizens, primarily of Poles, are being severely violated in the process of restituting the property, stolen from the former owners by Communist authorities.

However, national minorities have not yielded to the government's pressure, and continue to defend their common causes. The minority organizations — Polish, as well as Belarusian, Russian, and Tatar, as well as other-people of good will are united by common objectives. The level of cooperation among Lithuania's national minorities may be evaluated as very good. In the long term it may be expected to grow even more, since we are united by common goals and expectations.

Kiryl Kaścian

I don't Know How Many Belarusians are there in Poland

By Jaŭhien Miranovič

In the beginning of March 2012 Poland's Main Statistical Administration announced the unofficial results of the country's population census, which was taken in 2011. According to the preceding census of 2002, 48.5 thousands Polish citizens named their nationality as Belarusian. Ten years later, in 2011, this number had decreased by 1.5 thousand. Considering the population's natural movement , everything indicates that actually nothing has changed. Among those, who named themselves Belarusians, almost every third one declared as also being a Pole.

There exist no precise data concerning the geographical distribution of Belarusians in Poland; this doesn't allow us to present any hypotheses concerning factors leading to such a result. Neither do we completely know the source of the latest numbers.

A limited inquiry of a family's members and acquaintances allows us to state, that census takers have approached merely every third inhabitant in the Podlachian voivodship. Poland's citizens were also able to reply to presented questions on-line; however, that leaves a considerable number — about 40% — of those, who have not participated in the census in any form. Thus it is not quite clear from where the announced number — 47 thousand — came.

In my opinion, the result of the last year's census, just like that of the preceding one, is very optimistic for Poland's Belarusians. It is difficult to find any trace of Belarusianness on the streets of Bielastok, Bielsk Padliaski or Hajnaŭka, where most of the Belarusian population lives**.** The Polish language is not just dominant — it is eclusive there. The older generation that used Belarusian speech most often, is departing due to natural causes. It consisted mainly of country folk. In the cities there has always existed a small number of intelligentsia that respected and strove to preserve its cultural distinctness, yet which didn't necessarily want to help others to achieve these goals. While almost every Pole feels the need to become a missionary of the national cause, a member of the Belarusian intelligentsia is proud of having still remained Belarusian . In Poland's psychological conditions this may be considered an achievement , which, however, doesn't make it possible to restrain the clearly evident and rather rapid process of assimilation.

For the many years since the downfall of Communism the participation of Belarusian activists in parliamentary and communal elections has provided an important means of mobilizing the society. The Belarusian electoral committee has never achieved any notable success, yet its participation was a demonstration of Belarusians' presence in the Bielastok region,

Everything has changed after the three-year long lawsuit against the 11 members of the Programming Council of the weekly *Niva*, also leaders of Poland's Belarusian organizations. Practically all of Poland's official services, as well as the so-called " independent mass media" were engaged in proving the Belarusians' guilt. They haven't proven anything, yet they clearly made it understood that independent political activity by the population is undesirable. The limits of this activity were soon defined with the help of various state subsidies. It may freely develop in the field of folklore and displaying all kinds of primitive manifestations of the country-side legacy.

Neither does the number of 47 thousand provide an answer to the question: what kind of Belarusians? If the Republic of Belarus numbered as many Belarusians, as indicated by results of successive censes, then the language of the neighboring nation (i.e. Russia) would not be the actually only language of the supposedly independent state. If there were 8 million Belarusians in Belarus, no politician in 1995 would have dared to tear the national flag in front of TV cameras. Belarusians of the Bielastok region are the same as those who are subjects of Lukašenka. It is possible that there are not 47 thousand, but 147 thousand here. However, knowing this does not change anything. Those who declared themselves Poles are precisely the same people, as those who declared themselves Belarusians. They also go to churches, attend Belarusian festivals, organized by "activists;" they equally respect presidents of Belarus and Poland, often even

speak Belarusian, when not heard by an "outsider." Everything here is the same as in Minsk, Hrodna or Sluck, only there —it is in a completely different context of indicating their identity.

Therefore — when asked: how many Belarusians are there in Poland, I will answer — I don't know. The census results provide only a basis for all kinds of speculation.

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release

June 14, 2012

Notice:

Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to the Actions and Policies of Certain Members of the Government of Belarus and Other Persons to Undermine Belarus Democratic Processes or Institutions

On June 16, 2006, by Executive Order 13405, the President declared a national emergency and ordered related measures blocking the property of certain persons undermining democratic processes or institutions in Belarus, pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701-1706). The President took this action to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States constituted by the actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Belarus and other persons to undermine Belarus democratic processes or institutions, to commit human rights abuses related to political repression, including detentions and disappearances, and to engage in public corruption, including by diverting or misusing Belarusian public assets or by misusing public authority.

In 2011, the Government of Belarus continued its crackdown against political opposition, civil society, and independent media. The government arbitrarily arrested, detained, and imprisoned citizens for criticizing officials or for participating in demonstrations; imprisoned at least one human rights activist on manufactured charges; and prevented independent media from disseminating information and materials. These actions show that the Government of Belarus has taken additional steps backward in the development of democratic governance and respect for human rights.

The actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Belarus and other persons continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. Accordingly, the national emergency declared on June 16, 2006, and the measures adopted on that date to deal with that emergency, must continue in effect beyond June 16, 2012. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13405.

This notice shall be published in the *Federal Register* and transmitted to the Congress.

BARACK OBAMA

ECONOMY

EU Billions Flow to Lukashenka Despite Sanctions

By Nikolaj Nielsen

Lucrative oil and petrochemical contracts between the EU and Belarus help keep the former Soviet republic's economy afloat.

Belarus declared a €2.5 billion trade surplus in 2011 after trade between the two sides shot up by 76 percent in the first nine months alone.

Despite the economic hardships endured by most of the population, the country has seen a significant increase in trade with the EU over the last year - Belarus effectively doubled exports to Europe compared to 2010.

Some of the extra profit may go towards paying off its €30 billion of external debt, though an unstable currency could still be a problem.

Poverty in Minsk is hidden away - the streets are well maintained and clean, but in the back alleys and courtyards, homeless people can be seen rummaging through bins in the early morning hours before disappearing from view once again. Nobody dares to beg openly.

As import-export profits fill the state's coffers, the deterioration of living standards continues.

In Minsk, the price of meat has soared: the careful display of chicken behind shop windows has become an exercise in voyeurism for many who can no longer afford it.

While the price of food recently increased by 127.4 percent, the official average wage dropped from $530 to $353 per month. The president of Minsk's Organisation of Trade Unions says the real figure is closer to $150 per month. "People who work in the factories are earning this kind of wage," he told EUobserver.

Almost everyone is forced to work on a one-year contract, which helps keeps workers obedient to the regime. Contracts by the employer can be terminated at any moment without reason or following a phonecall from the KGB.

A deputy director of ideology staffed at every state-owned company ensures the workers understand their duty toward President Alexander Lukashenko. "His main duty is to inform on people who differ from the state line," said the trade union leader.

Meanwhile, behind closes doors in large government offices, the tight circle of the country's elite - dubbed the "regime's bagmen" - boast of huge profits with their EU business partners. At this level, their ideologue and overseer is Lukashenko himself.

Regime bagmen

Oligarchs such as Vladimir Peftiev and Yuriy Chizh have extensive European business connections.

The railway oil terminal in Zhabinka near Brest in Poland officially belongs to the state-owned enterprise Bel-

spetsvneshtechnika but is allegedly connected to Beltechexport, the weapons defence firm owned by Peftiev.

Aside from receiving, storing and shipping petroleum products at its Zhabinka terminal, Belspetsvneshtechnika is also one of the leading companies in the Commonwealth of Independent States specialising in the export and import of armaments, military equipment and other hi-tech products and science-intensive technologies.

Meanwhile, Chizh's Belneftegaz, NeftekhimTrading and Neonafta facilitate Belarus oil-based product trade in Europe. Neonafta is located in northern Belarus near the Dzvina river that flows from Russia all the way to Latvia and finally the Baltic Sea. The company sells diesel via Lithuania's port of Klaipeda, from where it is shipped to the Netherlands and UK.



Oligarchs Chyzh, Piefcijeu

Some of the oil-based products exported by Chizh are also said to go through the railway terminal in Zhabinka. In Latvia, Chizh owns the Mamas-D biodiesel factory, established in 1992.

Belneftegaz is based off the Pripyat river in Mozyr where the world's longest pipeline, the Druzhba, carries crude oil from Russia to be refined into petrol. The pipeline has a 2 million barrels per day (bpd) capacity, most of which goes to Europe, while around 0.5 million bpd stays in Belarus.

Belneftegaz also sells low-octane fuel to Ukraine and diesel to Poland, while NeftekhimTrading supplies paraxylene to the Netherlands.

Altogether, around 30,000 people in Belarus work for these companies, according to Fedynitch Gennadi, chairman of a Minsk-based trade union. He believes that EU sanctions against these companies would cripple Lukashenko. "We are 10 million in Belarus. We already live under sanctions - Lukashenko's sanctions," he told EUobserver in Minsk.

Peftiev and Chizh recently went on the EU's visa ban and asset freeze list together with 29 individual companies. But just one of the firms listed above - NeftekhimTrading - was put under the EU ban. Their holding companies - Beltekh Holding and LLC Triple - are also on the list. But this does not affect subsidiary firms, such as Chizh's Elite real estate company or others.

Belarus welcomes EU money

At a press conference in Minsk at the end of December, Lukashenko described healthy business relations with Europe as one of his crowning achievements in 2011, regardless of the EU sanctions on literally hundreds of his officials.

"Paradoxically, more economic support for the regime in 2011 has been coming not from the east, as most people believe, but from the west" said a recent study by the Moscow-based Committee on International Control, a human rights organisation specialising in Belarus.

The country ranked only 41 in 2010 as an EU trade partner, just below Iraq. But to Belarus, EU trade represented 30 percent of its total exports, most of which came in the form of fuels and mining products.

One senior EU official told EUobserver that Belarus is now seeking to open and expand its trade with Europe, focusing on transport, pharmaceuticals and nano-technology.

A source within the fragmented opposition - who wants to remain unnamed - told this website in Minsk that today half the country's trade is with the EU. "Oil products are directly connected to the Lukashenko family and [the income] is used for repression," he said.

Wealthy businessmen in Belarus pay into a presidential fund, which is used at Lukashenko's discretion. During election years, the fund balloons to almost $1 billion, though some believe it could be nearly eight times the amount.

Aliaksandr Makaev, deputy-chair of the Co-ordinating Council of Individual Entrepreneurs in Belarus, told this reporter in November that the fund is used to extort money and ensure loyalty from the business elite. "This fund payout is typical to all companies here," he said, adding that even Chizh spent a few days in jail in 2008 for "insubordination."

Black gold flows through Europe

Outside Russia, the Belarus National Statistics Committee says its number one trading partner is the Netherlands. Belarus does not produce oil but instead refines or sells off heavily subsidised Russian crude to other countries, including EU member states.

Belarus says it exported $4 billion to the Netherlands in 2011, more than twice the amount traded in the first nine months of 2010.

"The Netherlands is the second trade partner after Russia. One of the reasons for it is very efficient end professional Belarusian diplomats working in this country. Today, the ambassador there is Alena Gritsenko, former head of the [foreign ministry]," Raman Yakauleuski, a prominent Belarusian political observer, told EUobserver.

Yakauleuski says Gritsenko's predecessor in the Netherlands, Vladimir Gerasimovich, was also the former deputy minister of foreign affairs and a KGB colonel who once headed the external intelligence department.

EUobserver was unable to verify the statistics with the Dutch ministry of economic affairs. Based in The Hague, the ministry has a desk officer dedicated to Belarus but after three weeks of enquiries, it only provided a link to the Statistics Netherlands registry on bilateral trade data. The statistics do not disclose transit trade, which makes up the bulk of its commercial activities with Belarus.

The Statistics Netherlands registry shows the Dutch did not import, trade or transport any energy products from Belarus in 2010. But the numbers are misleading.

"The imports of oil reported in statline [database] are based on the country of origin where the oil comes out of the ground," a spokesman of the Netherlands Statistics Office told this website in an email. The registry shows The Netherlands imported 33 million tons of oil from Russia in 2010.

The Port of Rotterdam's business development manager was more forthcoming. He told EUobsever that Belarus' two major refineries sell products within the EU because its production exceeds domestic demand.

"Some tonnage is sold within Netherlands, diesel. From the Netherlands, it is shipped mainly to the Far East," he said.

Nikolaj Nielsen, EUobserver

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, March 31, 2012

Economic Consequences For Belarus from the EU-imposed Sanctions

Measures presented by Europe seem both sufficient and substantial. The Belarusian elites correctly understood all the European messages, from this comes the desire to hush up the conflict and withdraw from the EU-Belarusian pique. However, because the factor of one man is extremely high in Belarusian politics - the situation remains in limbo.

On March 23, the European Union introduced new sanctions against Belarusian individuals and companies that have both an economic nature as well as economic consequences for the country. The owner of the group of companies "Triple" Yuri Chizh and General Representative of the companies' group "Univest" in the CIS and the sponsor of the Presidential Sports Club Anatoly Ternavsky have joined the businessman Vladimir Peftiev on the black list (Peftiev has been on the list since last year). In addition, 27 of their companies have entered the black list. Without examining the criteria according to which these companies have been selected, we note only that some of the companies, operating exclusively in the domestic market of Belarus appeared on the black list, while others, which have close ties with several European companies (from Latvia and Slovenia) did not.

Getting onto the black list of companies related to the oil business, is of greatest interest, as the export of petroleum products into the EU via the Baltic ports is extremely profitable for both companies and for the budget. The EU has placed one of the largest oil traders in the Belarusian market on the blacklist - "Eunice Oil" (Ternavsky), and JV "NefteHimTreyding" (Chizh), which is engaged in refining of oil on commission, as well as in the import and export of petroleum products, including into the EU.

The European market is one of the major markets for Belarusian oil products, and supplies are growing, shown in January this year. According to customs statistics, exports of petroleum products, for example, in Latvia increased in monetary terms by $ 105 million in comparison with January of last year, in Lithuania – by almost $ 25 million, Poland – by 17 million dollars. Customers in the EU are also interested in Belarusian oil products. Lithuania and Latvia have already expressed their concern over the possible loss of Belarusian deliveries.

However, we are not yet talking about banning all exports of oil products from Belarus. Namely, in this case, sanctions would be extremely painful. We are only talking about sanctions against individual businessmen and their companies. And in this case, the negative effects are minimal.

At present it is not possible to mathematically estimate the economic impact of the sanctions; however there is no doubt that damage will be done. The fact that the Belarusian side has refrained from imposing retaliatory sanctions, and in the first place, from the most conflict-ridden scenario suggests that the experts of Lukashenko have shown their ability to think strategically and perform an analysis of not only short-term losses.

Of course, some of the losses will be neutralized by new supply schemes and new companies. However, the discovery of new business schemes is a rather costly business. Also, we should not forget about the image (psychological) costs. Thus, all costs can be categorized as short-term and long-term, as well as direct and indirect.

Economic consequences:

1) transaction costs - the search for new partners to open new roundabout schemes, the threat or the transition of the oil business under the Russian protectorate.

2) image-making costs, the split in the elites and the need to make a choice (I am with Lukashenko or not) - an indirect incentive for the migration of the most senior managers and businessmen to Russia. Although it is not possible to calculate economically the painfulness of this measure, in our opinion, this is quite a sensitive measure, because on the one hand, high-ranking businessmen and officials do not want to make such a choice. On the other hand, Russia acts as a kind of vacuum cleaner for the Belarusian labor market - and the loss of highly skilled professionals, executives, etc. reduces the stability and adequacy of the Belarusian model.

3) an increase in dependence on Russian capital and its banking system – it will be increasingly difficult for Belarus to attract investment and credit resources in new conditions. At the same time, these resources are extremely important - both for the return and maintenance of old debts and modernization of the economy. For example, the government is considering an ambitious program to modernize oil refineries, electricity, etc., however the country does not have funds for this. Accordingly, there is a great need for investment or low-cost loans, but European banks and companies will have even less motivation to work in Belarus in the new environment, while the Russian side is not so interested in lending to enterprises, as acquiring assets. At the same time, Belarus is not yet ready to give all the assets of the country to Russia (or Russia is not willing to pay the price offered by Lukashenko).

4) the likelihood of a new IMF credit has been further reduced. Under the conditions of tough confrontation both with Europe and with the EU, the probability of a positive outcome of negotiations on a new loan stand-by

program has been reduced to almost zero. At the same time, Belarus already needs the loan for 2013.

Thus, despite the seemingly minimal damage to the country and its oligarchs, in fact, measures presented by Europe seem both sufficient and substantial. The Belarusian elite correctly understood all the European messages. From this comes the desire to hush up the conflict and withdraw from the EU-Belarusian pique. However, because the factor of one man is extremely high in Belarusian politics - the situation remains in limbo

Source: Solidarity with Belarus Information Office, April 3, 2012.

HISTORICAL DATES

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June 14, 1900

Birthdate of **Michas Zabejda-Sumicki,** a famous Belarusian opera singer. Lived and performed in Kharbin (China), Milan, Warsaw, Prague.

June 19, 1924

Birthdate of **Vasil Bykau,** an outstanding Belarusian writer and public figure. Most of his works covered the topic of World War Two, experienced by him as a soldier.

Towards the end of his life he was forced to seek refuge abroad. He lived in Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic. He was forced out of his homeland due to attacks in the state-run press and censorship of his writings. The regime continues to take revenge against Bykau even after his death. Vasil Bykau's books are not being republished in Belarus and films about his life and creative work are banned.

Bykau was considered for the Nobel prize in literature in late 1990. He died on June 22, 2003.

July 7, 1882

Janka Kupala (Ivan Lucevic), a great Belarusian poet, was born in Viazynka, near the town of Maladecna.

Kupala is considered one of the founders of the Belarusian literature.

. **July 15, 1410**

Anniversary of the **Battle of Grunwald,** one of the biggest in the Middle Ages. The German Teutonic Knights, with West European mercenaries, were then decisively defeated by an army commanded by the Polish king Jahajla (Jagiello) and Litva's Grand DukeVitaut, supported by Czech Hussite and vassal Tartar contingents.

BELARUS' FORUM

Belarusian Activists Say They Feel Like 'Hostages'

By Robert Coalson

MINSK -- Zhana Litvina, head of the independent Belarus Association of Journalists, got an unpleasant surprise on March 14 to mark Belarus's Constitution Day.

Migration officials at Minsk's main airport refused to allow her to board a flight for Warsaw, giving no explanation.

Meanwhile, at the Minsk train station, Andrey Bandarenka, head of the independent Platforma human-rights group, was denied permission to board a train for the Polish capital, where he intended to participate in a conference.

In all, nearly a dozen Belarusian activists, independent journalists, and opposition political figures have been denied permission to travel abroad following a March 1 announcement by the Prosecutor-General's Office that anyone supporting intensified European Union sanctions against the government of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka could be prevented from leaving the country.

However, officials deny the existence of a "blacklist" of individuals targeted for refusal.

'List Of Hostages'

Andrey Dynko, editor of the *Nasha Niva* newspaper, found out he is among those blocked from exiting when he was turned back near the border with Lithuania on March 14.



Andrey Dynko

My case is evidence of the fact that what we're effectively dealing with here is a list of hostages," Dynko said. "It is a weird feeling to realize that you've been designated a hostage. But under the present conditions in Belarus, some might consider it an honor."

Andrey Dynko: "What we're effectively dealing with here is a list of hostages."

The exit refusals appear to be the latest round of tit-for-tat measures between Minsk and the European Union. Last month, the EU extended targeted individual sanctions to include 19 judges and two police officials believed to be complicit in the repression of the political opposition. In response, Minsk asked the EU ambassador and the Polish ambassador in Belarus to leave the country, prompting the EU to pull out all 27 member-state envoys in a show of solidarity.

The European Union is continuing to watch the exit-denial situation closely as the bloc's foreign ministers prepare to discuss relations with Belarus yet again at a meeting next week.

"In terms of our policy, we have made it very clear -- the policy is very principled," said Maja Kocijancic, a spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton. "We have been looking and are continuing to follow this very closely. Belarus will again be on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council next week when the ministers meet on Friday, March 23. And they will look into further restrictive measures as an important instrument of pressure on Belarusian authorities."

'Destructive Elements'

Litvina is certain that the authorities' denial of permission for activists to leave the country is a direct signal to the EU in the run-up to the March 23 session.

"Official Minsk is demonstrating its position by limiting the ability to exit the country," Litvina said. "It is possible the authorities consider these people 'destructive elements' -- they already adopted that term for describing their opponents several years ago. The expansion of this list will depend in large measure on events at the international level. If once again we hear a forceful recommendation to free political prisoners, then the pressure [on the opposition] within Belarus itself will be intensified."



Zhana Litvina,

Mikhail Yanchuk, a correspondent for the Warsaw-based Belsat television channel, was stopped on a train at the border town of Brest on March 14, although he was allowed to travel freely just one week before.

"This seems to be proof that this list is growing week by week and many of our colleagues may be added to it," Yanchuk said. "So we must act now and use all available means to get this policy changed. It would appear that this is a continuation of the policy of targeted sanction and pressure against journalists with the goal of frightening everyone else."

The Old End-Around

Ironically, some activists have circumvented the de facto travel ban by leaving the country across the border with Russia, which is open because of the customs union agreement between the two countries.

On March 15, Litvina's Belarus Association of Journalists issued a statement condemning restrictions on journalists' freedom of movement and increased harassment by state security organs. On March 1, Bandarenka's Platforma NGO called on the EU to include all prison and jail officials on the EU targeted-sanctions list for their role in "the torture, cruel, inhuman, and humiliating treatment of citizens of our country."

EU spokeswoman Kocijancic called on authorities in Minsk to back away from their new policy.

"The European Union has made its position very clear," Kocijancic said. "We believe that all harassment of members of the opposition and of civil society must stop, and this also includes their freedom of movement. There can't be prohibitions of their freedom of movement."

Written in Prague by Robert Coalson based on reporting by Ales Dashchynski in Minsk, with contributions by Rikard Jozwiak in Brussels

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 15, 2012

Will the "Optimization" of Belarusian History Become a Guarantee Of Honesty and Patriotism in Educating New Generations?

The current ideologization of the study of history reflects to a large degree basic trends in state politics, directed at selecting for official history instruction only certain personages and subjects, at the cost of the multi-faceted and abstract nature of history itself. In this context the planned reduction of hours for the instruction of humanities is of special significance, since it directly affects the standard of the education system in general, and in particular that of the personnel it is preparing.

In order to obtain their assessment of the current situation in Belarusian history, *The_Point Journal/Belarusian Review* has consulted four authoritative Belarusian historians — Siarhiej Novikaŭ, Hienadź Sahanovič, Aleś Smaliančuk and Zachar Šybieka, who represent different spheres of the study of Belarusian history.

The_Point Journal/Belarusian Review: *The decision #1 by the Republican Council of Universities' Rectors of February 29, 2012 dealing with the optimization of the contents, structure and volume of the humanities in institutions of higher learning substantially reduces the number of hours allotted to teaching the humanities. In your opinion, how will this be reflected in the further development of these sciences, and in the quality of knowledge, received by students of nonprofile specialties?*

Siarhiej Novikaŭ: I believe that in everyday life it will result in a separation of theoretical knowledge from the practical experience. This is my brief summary. The process of simply acquiring a limited volume of empirical knowledge - bound to result due to the planned optimization - won't create conditions for creative development of highly qualified, modern professionals. For instance, in some European countries, first of all in Switzerland, a 4-year instruction course is not considered sufficient for receiving even a professional qualification. Proceeding from this premise, our higher education system at this time is planning preparation of specialists with only limited

professional competency. This is true under conditions of transforming knowledge into the basis of developing the future society.

On the basis of empirical facts one may just describe a certain historical picture; however, grasping the essence of past events, and understanding them in a complex way is impossible without the true scientific synthesis and analysis. Without this kind of knowledge we won't be able to discuss the development of society, since only at this higher level of knowledge may one speak about seeking strategy for our future existence. In the future, what may be faced by our universities, whose development has been for ages connected with the docents' and professorial schools? What future consequences may be expected by our universities without professionals with degrees and titles - only with a staff of educated workers? What future prospects may be expected on the premise of the declared form of "optimization"? And tomorrow will be the time for synthesizing knowledge, time for its mandatory analysis, and time for systemic creativity in taking advantage of the new.



Siarhiej Novikau

Hienadź Sahanovič: One may always consider reducing the number of hours of teaching the humanities a step backward; for today's Belarus it will be especially harmful. My colleagues, instructors of Minsk universities are unanimous in complaining that students coming to auditoriums are increasingly less prepared; under realistic conditions it is impossible to give them a good education. With these trends of devaluing the humanities and lowering their levels, such an "optimization" will lead to an even more drastic decline in general humanities education, particularly that of history. In my opinion, and in this context, the adopted decision is simply scandalous



Hienadz Sahanovic

Aleś Smaliančuk: It may seem strange, but under present conditions I see a clear positive aspect in this decision.

In the last decade the situation with humanities education in the Republic of Belarus has appeared horrible. Today's humanities are fully impregnated with postulates of state ideology. Instead of educating a harmonious person, oriented in the world of current humanities, it is primarily focused on the ideological zombification of Belarusian youth.This concerns high schools, as well as higher educational institutions, including private ones. Positions of individual instructors, retaining their loyalty to the principles of science and objectivity, do not change the situation. You may sense it clearly when discussing Belarus' history with first-year students of the European Humanities University in Vilnius. Under these conditions one may only welcome a reduction in the volume of instruction in the humanities.

A similar situation has arisen in the sphere of developing humanities financed and controlled by the state. Particularly, when speaking about Belarusian historiography, one has to admit that most noticeable and interesting projects and publications are connected with the non-governmental sector of science development. The so-called "official," or "directival" historiography has no ... life. In the last decade it completely isolated itself from world science processes, and increasingly resembles the one-time Soviet historiography, that occupied itself primarily with serving the ideology of the ruling regime. Unfortunately, many former historian colleagues — in their struggle for a spot at the state feeding trough — lost not only their professional, but also their human dignity.



Ales Smaliančuk:

Zachar Šybieka : Dehumanization of the higher education signifies de-intelectualization and lowering the erudition of the young generation of Belarus' citizens. This is obvious and absurd. This is why the motivation for such a step seems to be explained not only by the desire to economize on spreading knowledge of the humanities among students. Less educated young people are easier to manage. Only people who don't think critically , have no experience with the viability of other nations, and don't know the history of their own country may be convinced of the infallibility of present leadership's policies, of their uniqueness and supethe riority. A satisfactory preparation in the humanities is impossible to obtain even with existing programs and education methods in the nation's universities. Even now it impossible to to force individuals with limited demands. to become educated in humanities. They pass exams, and tomorrow they forget everything. Humanities education or self-education is increasingly moving to the Internet. This process will continue. This is why it is impossible to quench young people's thirst for

knowledge of the humanities by any circulars or administrative measures.



Zachar Sybieka :

There is only one thing we should be concerned about: reducing hours of instruction should not be accompanied by a reduction in the volume of teaching aids. It is necessary not only to preserve the established volumes of knowledge; they should be even increased. And their mastery should not only remain mandatory in exams and appeals to students. They should study with "thick" textbooks.

Thus, humanities disciplines will not suffer from reduction in instruction hours. Who will suffer - it is the instructors, deprived of their workload, and possibly losing their jobs. And this in the long term will indirectly lower the prestige of humanities scholars, who will become unnecessary for the state. There are two possible results. Competition in the university market will grow. Only the zealous and capable will endure. Instructors from the old Soviet guard will be sifted out. However, along with lack of free competition in finding jobs, the role of the "state umbrella" and corruption will grow. The field will experience the influx of a new generation: instructors, who are loyal to authorities, but professionally helpless, and hapless scholars.

The_Point Journal/Belarusian Review: *Recently Leu Krystapovic has declared that "attempts to derive the Belarusian identity from the so-called Grand Duchy of Lithuania are outside the real process of our spiritual consolidation and development." In your opinion, isn't this statement a manifestation of government's plans to replace or substitute those national narratives that created the historical concept that is now being taught in Belarus' schools and universities? Can we say that this combination of certain elements of west-Russism (zapadnerusizm) and Pan-Slavism , is now about to become the main historical narrative, required for the ideological consolidation of integration processes in the post-Soviet space?*

Siarhiej Novikaŭ: I proceed on the premise that Belarusian identity has its own history, without which it is not possible to discern it - in the context of the history of self-development and recognition in the transformation space of global communication. However, the attempt to transfer it into the modern society does not hold water due to the fact that the process of forming an identity is connected not only with objective conditions, but with subjective factors as well.Therefore, in the process of politological reconstruction such an approach may serve in a certain sense as an "hermeneutical" key for explaining the modern Belarusian phenomenon.

However, the present Belarusian identity is conditioned by other factors, rather remote from the time of the Grand Duchy of Litva , in which statehood was determined by one main criterion - the Belarusianness of Litvins/Belarusians. In this case the historical experience of identity must be analyzed in the context of history, understanding its great significance for self-development of the person. In this aspect the true Belarusian history may represent a deposit of conscience, honesty and patriotism in bringing up new generations.

Hienadź Sahanovič: The quoted Mr. L. Krystapovič has long been asking for an unequivocally positive reply to your questions. However, with the passing away of Piatro Pietrykau and Jakau Trascanok, the team of leaders of this course has lost its main players. One may observe now in history education unequivocal processes, and Krystapovic's statement appears to be just one of the relapses of the policy that during Lukasenka's presidency has returned to our history education many ideologems of West-russism. However, I believe that it does not reflect as much the government's policy, as the author's personal views. Therefore, let us not exaggerate the significance of Krystapovic's statement, by connecting it with plans for some further revision of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's place and role in Belarus' history.

Aleś Smaliančuk This trend has long been evident in our country.The current Pan-Slavism and West-russism — which, as a matter of fact, resembles more a certain variety of the Russian chauvinism, than its own ideological sources (M.V. Kayalovich and others) is actively joined by Orthodox fanaticism. However, the anti-Belarusian ideological "nutrition" has not become the main historical narrative. These views have a fairly strong opposition among Belarusian humanities scholars. Even the former director of the History Institute of Belarus' Academy of Sciences, A. Kavalienia, has publicly criticized statements by Krystapovich. in addition, the camp of Pan-Slavists, Great Russian chauvinists and Orthodox fanatics does not does not have at its disposal sufficient intellectual potential for an evenhanded discussion of the national concept of the country's development, for instance. Juggling historical facts, open lie and falsification, and unconcealed hatred for various forms of Belarusianness (see publications by V. Charapitsa, A. Bendzish et al.) repel people from this ideology. Even the generous financing of this anti-Belarusian campaign by certain organizations in the Russian Federation, as well as by Belarus' state budget, has not changed the situation, and hopefully, will not change it . ..

Zachar Šybieka : The court scholar has expressed a long-existing practice of singling out in our official history only Orthodox and pro-Russian personages and subjects. The-history of Belarus is treated from positions of the nonexistent Soviet Union, and from those of Czarist and post-Soviet Russia.

The myth of inferiority of the Belarusian people, of its age-old unity with Russians, has been created on the order) of Catherine II , after the annexation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The falsification was fortified by a severe revision and destruction of unacceptable historical documents. The czarist myth was later taken over by historians from Poland, Lithuania, the Soviet Union, aand practically the entire world. As a result world historiography considers this Russian falsification to be Belarus' real history, even now. Such views are not prevalent even among official historians, and representatives of authorities.

However, there still exists the Russian "fifth column," that expresses doubts about Belarusian people's ability to live independently, in accordance with its own values and traditions. It is comforting to note that such ideological precepts have not harmed and will not harm the development of the fatherland's history, as written from the position of Belarusian national interests.

The idea of reviving the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was nurtured for over a century by Count Ahinski, the insurgent Kastus Kalinouski, Belarusian leaders Vaclau Lastouski and Anton Luckievic. The idea of creating Belarus arose later. And it was supported not only by the Orthodox, but also by Catholics. Nobody has the right to eliminate from Belarus' history whole epochs: neither those connected with Russia, nor those connected with Poland. No respectable Belarus' citizen would deny the Licvin tradition in the history of Belarusian people. We can only be proud of it.

Dostoyevsky Experts Strike Back At Belarusian Leader

By Richard Solash

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's speechwriter would be well-advised to start brushing up his resume -- if, that is, he was behind the gaffe committed by Lukashenka during his annual address to the nation on May 8.

Alarm bells should have immediately gone off for the attentive listener when, in the middle of a rambling, two-hour speech, the man once dubbed "Europe's last dictator" made the unfortunate choice of quoting Russian literay giant Fyodor Dostoyevsky out of context.

Dostoyevsky has been dead and buried for well over 100 years, but he may have shifted, if not rolled over, in his grave when the Belarusian leader quoted the line, "There is nothing more unbearable for a man than freedom."

The great novelist's words were being used, it seemed, to justify Minsk's crackdown on civil liberties.

Scholars of the famous writer are less than amused -- and if Lukashenka understood his error, they say, he would want to hide his head in the sand, too.

The line comes from "The Grand Inquisitor," the famous parable within Dostoyevsky's final novel, "The Brothers Karamazov."

"The genius writer was correct," Lukashenka added. "In obtaining freedom, man suddenly understands that he has shouldered a heavy burden, because freedom involves responsibility. A person must make decisions himself and himself answer for them."

People, Lukashenka concluded, should therefore change their attitude toward the government and realize that freedom cannot occur overnight.

The West, too, he said, should remember the lesson, and understand that spurring Belarus toward that goal is pointless.

Little did Lukashenka realize, however, that his Dostoyevsky quote is uttered by a character -- the Grand Inquisitor -- who has given himself up to Satan.

In the passage, the Grand Inquisitor says to Christ:

"You want to go into the world empty-handed, with your vague and undefined promise of freedom, which men, dull and unruly as they are by nature, are unable so much as to understand -- which they avoid and fear? For never was there anything more unbearable to the human race than personal freedom! Do you see these stones in the desolate and scorching wilderness? Command that these stones be made bread and mankind will run after you, obedient and grateful like a herd of cattle. But even then they will be ever diffident and trembling, lest you should take away your hand and they lose thereby their bread!"

That's fodder for reflection on human nature, to be sure, and according to scholars, part of Dostoyevsky's critique of the Catholic Church.

But it is the Grand Inquisitor speaking here and not the author himself, stresses Deborah Martinsen, a professor at Columbia University and the president of the International Dostoevsky Society.

"Dostoyevsky uses his characters to voice sentiments, ideas, beliefs -- some of which he agrees with, but many of which he does not agree with. And he's definitely polemicizing with the Grand Inquisitor," said Martinsen.

"Dostoyevsky does not hold the Grand Inquisitor's point of view. The Christ figure does not speak once when the Grand Inquisitor speaks, but at the end, he kisses [him]. That's his response. His response, in theological terms, is that he, Christ, can forgive all, including the Grand Inquisitor."

Martinsen adds, "I'm not a political commentator, [but] what I can do is tell you that [Lukashenka's] misquotation says that he's on the side of those who want earthly power and are willing to compromise their souls for it."

Vera Biron, the deputy director of the Fyodor Dostoyevsky Literary-Memorial Museum in Saint Petersburg, agrees:

"The Belarusian dictator has apparently never read Dostoyevsky. It is known that Dostoevsky disagreed with [this message] and that 'The Grand Inquisitor' was written against such treatment of people and their freedom," she said.

"My commentary is simple: In Dostoyevsky's terms, Lukashenka would not even be the Grand Inquisitor, but one of the 'demons' who is obsessed, it seems, with one idea -- a pathological thirst for power. He thinks of his own people as a herd of cattle whose obedience is not even bought, but coerced."

In Belarus, where opposition to Lukashenka's hardline rule continues to simmer, some have suggested that the president's speechwriter wanted to purposely embarrass him. RFE/RL reported that Lukashenka postponed the delivery of his annual address for several weeks amid displeasure with a draft.

If that's not the case, or if Lukashenka inserted the quote himself, someone was apparently not reading carefully enough. But they are now. The Dostoyevsky

quote does not appear in the transcript of Lukashenka's address that is posted on his official website.

"It is useless to recommend Lukashenka to read Dostoevsky. He's incapable of comprehending," said the Dostoevsky Museum's Biron. "We can only feel for the people who have to exist under that maniac

Source: Radio Free Europe/Raio Liberty, May 10, 2012."

BELARUS ABROAD

Father Nadsan: Belarusians' Political Passivity Is the Cause of the Current Situation In Our Country

Father Aliaksandr NADSAN is considered a legendary figure of the Belarusian diaspora. He has been living in Great Britain since 1946. There he became one of the founders of the Association of Belarusians in Great Britain. He has edited several Belarusian diaspora periodicals and is the author of several books on the history of Belarus. Since 1971 Fr. Nadsan has been the director of the Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum in London, the largest Belarusian library abroad. Since 1981 he has been heading the Belarusian Catholic mission in Great Britain, and since the late 1980s has been serving as the Apostolic Visitator for Belarusian Greek-Catholic believers abroad.

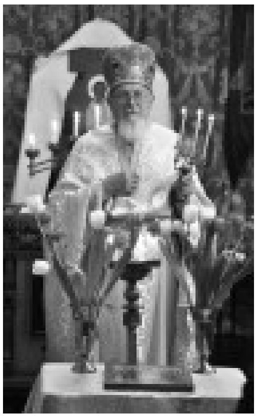


Photo by Andrei Aliaksandrau

In his interview for *Belarusian Review* Father Nadsan discusses the issues of national identity, religion, language in the contemporary Belarusian society. He also describes the relations between the Belarusian diaspora and their countries of residence referring to the example of Belarusians in the UK.

Belarusian Review (BR): *Is religion capable of playing a consolidating role for Belarusians within the country, as well as in diaspora?*

Father Aliaksandr Nadsan (fr. A.N.): I would be very careful in such assessments, because religion first of all represents a person's relations with God; here one must respect everyone's personal choice. This is why religion is not a national issue. In other words, faith in God is the same for all nations, and in the community of God's children there should be a place for everyone. If it was God's will to create Belarusians, it means that they do have the right to exist, and nobody can forbid them to be who they are. It is the duty of the Church to teach people to respect everyone, and accept each person as such. The Church must organize its spiritual activity in the most accessible fashion — in people's native language, thus respecting what God gave these people. This is why the Church should under no circumstances be persuading people that they are different from what they actually are (for example, persuading Belarusians to be Poles or Russians).

((BR): *How do you evaluate the relations between the diaspora and the country of its residence, taking as the example the Belarusians in Great Britain?*

(fr. A.N.): At the present, such relations are practically non-existent — although the situation used to be quite different in the early 1990s. At that time we were approached for information — about who Belarusians are. We were helping in setting up contacts and distributing English-language information about Belarus. Our diaspora also provided much assistance to children, affected by the Chornobyl catastrophe. I have personally undertaken about 15 trips to Belarus, with medicine for sick children. Such assistance came also from the Belarusians in North America.

After Lukashenka came to power(?), our contacts gradually diminished; the close cooperation of the diaspora with the Belarusian state ceased. Perhaps Lukashenka was not against continuing this cooperation, but only under the condition that the diaspora advocate his policies. A powerful negative factor that affected our cooperation, was the cultural policy of the Belarusian authorities, first of all the Russification and destruction of Belarusian culture.

Generally, the diaspora represents a specific society. While living in a foreign milieu, its members want to remain Belarusians. They don't have and must not have any influence on what is happening in Belarus. However, if normal relations are established between the diaspora and the home state, the diaspora would be capable of helping the state in many ways — financially, and through its contacts. One may refer to the example of our neighbors, the Poles. Beginning with the 19th century, their western diasporas practically lived for Poland, advertising and helping it.

Generally speaking , the second generation of emigrants, born in the West, enjoys full citizenship rights and is capable of active participation in the social and political life in their countries of residence. If they have been brought up in the Belarusian spirit, by means of their contacts and efforts they could advance Belarusian interests abroad. Unfortunately, contrasting with the Poles, among Belarusians such persons are practicaly non-existent.

(BR): *In your opinion, what role does the Belarusian society assign to the Belarusian language? Will the Belarusians survive as a nation without the Belarusian language?*

(fr. A.N.): Making an analogy to the situation in the British islands, one may refer to the example of the Welsh people, who speak mostly English (especially in southern Wales), or the Irish, the majority of whom also speak English. This is sad, but such are local realities. As a Belarusian, I would not like to see Belarus become similar to Wales or Ireland in this matter. However, now the situation in Belarus is evolving precisely in this direction, There are many nationally conscious Belarusians, who speak only Russian and do not feel the need to speak Belarusian. As a human being, I find it sad and painful. I wish that, in spite of circumstances, Belarusians would get to know and love their beautiful language. Without their native language, it will be dificult for them to survive as a nation, since the national consciousness in Belarus is still weak. Belarusians must realize that the Belarusian language is a great spiritual treasure that is in danger of disappearing.

(BR): *How do you assess the issue of Belarusian national identity during the last twenty years?*

(fr. A.N.): Prior to Belarus attaining independence, one may have spoken of Belarusians' weak national identity. They have fought for their independence less than their Baltic neighbors. Although there existed a national movement, it was not massive enough to push society for radical changes. While noted public figures like Nil Hilevic or Hienadz Buraukin suffered true heartache for the Belarusian cause, most Belarusians were indifferent as far as the the national issue was concerned.

Beginning in 1991 the situation has changed; during the first three years of independence much was accomplished. At that time many people, particularly among the youth, were full of enthusiasm. This time period lasted only 3-4 years, which, however, was sufficient for building a foundation for further action. Compared to the Baltic countries, Belarus in 1991 was just beginning its path in this direction; one should not forget that Belarus was the most russified Soviet republic in the European part of the Soviet Union. The situation changed somewhat with Lukashenka's coming to power; yet, until about 2000 public use of the Belarusian language was widespread. The problem of schools had to be considered first: parents often questioned the usefulness of Belarusian-language education for their children, believing that the Russian language would open ”the door to world” for them. However, this notion is erroneous. Efforts of present authorities, designed to russify the country, are being reflected in people's positive attitude toward its native language. This applies especially to young people. I admire that part of the young generation that reached their Belarusianness despite everything.

It's worthwhile to note that the experience of Europe's small and medium-sized nations — the Norwegians, Danes, the Dutch — show that people may freely use 2-3 foreign languages without abandoning their own. In our country there prevails a common misconception that, in order to attain better positions in the future, one should abandon one's own language. It's difficult to blame today's Belarusians for such a brainwashed view. It is the result of the initially Russian imperialist, and later Soviet policies, applied to several generations of Belarusians.

In addition, Belarusians have always been characterized by political passivity. This feature has remained; it explains the current situation in the country.

(BR): *Do you believe that today's Belarusians have realized that they are Belarusians ?*

(fr. A.N.): Looking at the young generation, one may see various groups of people. However, the existence of an independent republic of Belarus has entered the people's consciousness. The young generation was born already in the independent Belarus and is not familiar with the Soviet rule. This is why the life itself makes its own rules. Therefore, even if a person speaks Russian, he knows and realizes that he's Belarusian. Actually, this situation may be defined as a civic Belarusian identity. And even Lukashenka will hold on tooth and nail to this independent Belarus. If Belarus becomes a province of Russia, it will mean the end of his political career. This is why the existence of an independent Belarusian state is a huge achievement, and a powerful consolidating factor. Yet, at the same time it reflects a weak national identity. The described civic identity hasn't been linked yet with the Belarusian language and national culture; without this linkage a transition from the civic identity to a national Belarusian identity is impossible. I would very much want to believe in an optimistic future for our people.

Interview was conducted by ***Hanna Vasilevich***

”King Lear” in Belarusian

On May 18, 2012 the Belarus Free Theatre completed its two-day performance at the ”Globe to Globe” festival in London. The theatre, outlawed in Belarus , showed its version of **King Lear** on the stage of Shakespeare's Globe.

The Belarus Free Theatre presented the play **King Lear** adapted by **Nikolai Khalezin** and directed by **Vladimir Scherban**. The play was performed in Belarusian.

It would be an understatement to say that Belarusians' performance was a success, the play was a bombshell. Actors were recalled seven times, and the Globe director **Dominic Dromgoole** called the Belarusian version “the most accurate interpretation of the classic play I saw in my lifetime.”

According to **Nikolai Khalezin**, who adapted the text, and was produced the play, it was his first and last experience in revising Shakespeare. “It is easier to write one's own text, then to try to abridge Shakespeare's text. It was a challenge for the theatre.” said Nikolai Khalezin.

.**Natalia Koliada**, the director of the Belarus Free Theatre, said: “It is a historic event for the Belarusian art and the country in general. King Lear on the stage of Shakespeare's theatre began speaking Belarusian.

The 6-weeks-long festival of Shakespeare's plays, entitled ”Globe to Globe” with 37 participants from different countries is a part of Culture Olympics dedicated to the London Olympics in summer 2012.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, May 20, 2012.

NEWS BRIEFS

March 17, 2012

Belarus executes Minsk subway bombing convict

One of two men who allegedly carried out a subway bombing attack in Belarus that killed 15 people and wounded hundreds more has been executed, his mother has said.

Liubou Kavaliova said she had received official notification about the execution of her son,

Uladzislau Kavaliou.

Kavaliou and Dzmitry Kanavalau, both 26 years old, were convicted in November of planting a bomb at the busiest subway station in Belarus' capital, Minsk, last April. Investigators said the men were driven by "hatred for humankind", not political or religious motives.

The Supreme Court found that Kanavalau made the bomb and stayed with Kavaliou in his Minsk apartment just before the blast. Investigators said Kavaliou was aware of the blast plans.

But Kavaliou pleaded not guilty and said he did not participate in the bombing. The men's defense attorneys said the evidence presented in court was trivial and inconclusive.

'Grandiose provocation'

Critics of the ex-Soviet nation's authoritarian government suggested it may have staged the blast to divert attention from the worst economic crisis in its post-Soviet history.

President Aliaksandr Lukashenka denied the speculation and denied the men clemency last week.

"I am sure my son was innocent,'' Kavaliou's mother told The Associated Press, saying she believes the execution was rushed "to hide all the details of his case".

Capital sentences are usually carried out in Belarus a year or two after the conviction, and the hasty execution added to the controversy about the bombing, a Belarusian political analyst said.

"The version that the whole thing is a grandiose provocation by security services remains very popular,'' Minsk-based analyst Viktor Demidov told the *Gazeta.ru* online daily newspaper.

Executions in Belarus are carried out with a bullet to the back of the head. The time and place is a state secret, and relatives of those executed are never told where the bodies are buried.

Belarus is Europe's only country that still puts people to death, and rights activists claim around 400 people have been executed since the 1991 Soviet collapse.

Source: ***Al Jazeera***

April 11, 2012

Niasviž Castle to open in June

An official ceremony to open Niasviž Castle will be held in the middle of June of 2012, Culture Minister Pavel Latushka stated during the opening ceremony of the Vacation 2012 tourist exhibition.

Reconstruction of the Niasviž Castle was launched 1998. This year the castle will host more than 50 events including Spivakov's concert in April and opera evenings. According to the Culture Minister, the opera evenings will become traditional for Niasviž.

Pavel Latushka also said that approximately 5 million people visited Belarusian museums in 2011. At present there are 160 museums in Belarus, 154 of which are affiliated with the Culture Ministry. Besides, 28 officially registered theaters are available for tourists and the number of their visitors is growing.

The most visited is the Brest Fortress (in 2011, it was visited by more than 300,000). It is followed by the Homiel Palace and Park complex. Popular landmarks also include Niasviž Castle (about 200,000 in 2011) and Mir Castle (186,000). In Minsk the biggest tourist attraction is the National Art Museum, which welcomed more than 160,000 people last year.

The Culture Minister stressed that Niasviž and Mir Castles will welcome up to 300,000 tourists each year. "We hope that these will be both Belarusian citizens and foreign guests," he explained. In Belarus, there are more than 5,000 objects of historical and cultural heritage.

In general, Pavel Latushka said, the Culture Ministry wants to develop domestic tourism in Belarus and increase the number of foreign tourists. Tourism and culture are areas that are combined through the economy and mutual interest, the minister said.

For his part, Minister of Sport and Tourism Aleh Kachan noted that Belarus' friends from other countries came to attend the exhibition. All in all, taking part in the event are 13 countries. "As we can see, tourism is not afraid of any difficulties and crises," said Aleh Kachan.

Source: ***BelTA***

April 15, 2012

Belarus Opposition Leader Sannikau, Former Aide Freed From Prison

Former Belarusian presidential candidate and leading opposition figure Andrey Sannikau has been released from prison in a surprise move that highlights Minsk's sporadic efforts to respond to Western pressure over persistent rights abuses.

Sannikau's lawyer said late on April 14 that the 58-year-old former deputy foreign minister who ran afoul of authoritarian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka had received a pardon and returned to the capital.

Supporters got more welcome news hours later, when a democratic activist and former campaign aide to Sannikau who was arrested at the same election-night rally in December 2010 was freed. Dzmitry Bandarenka was serving a two-year sentence that had been handed down one year ago. RFE/RL's Belarus Service confirmed that, like Sannikau, Bandarenka was released on the basis of a presidential pardon.

The Euroopean Union has called for the release of all political prisoners in Belarus – of whom there are currently around 10 – and recently stepped up travel and economic sanctions against key Belarusian officials in an effort to put pressure on the Lukashenka government.

The OSCE chairperson-in-office, Irish Deputy Prime Minister Eamon Gilmore, expressed relief over the release but stressed concern for other prisoners including another former presidential candidate, Mikola Statkevich.

"This is excellent news for [Sannikau], his family and his friends, but I remain concerned over the fate of other jailed political opponents, notably former presidential candidate

[Mikola] Statkevich," Gilmore was quoted as saying. "I call upon President [Lukashenka] to build upon this positive development and release all remaining jailed opposition leaders."

'Solidarity Saved Me'

"First of all, I'd like to thank the people for their solid support," Sannikau told RFE/RL's Belarus Service after his release. "It was really strong support. I felt it even physically. It was the people's solidarity that not only supported me but saved me.

Source: **Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty**

April 15, 2012

Lukashenka proposes Vatican to mediate Belarus-EU dialogue

On April 9, President Lukashenka met with Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Order of Malta, Paul Friedrich von Furherrom and on April 10 he met with the Apostolic Nuncio in the Republic of Belarus Claudio Gugerotti. During both meetings, the President noted that the Holy See could play a mediator role in the relations between Belarus and the Western European countries.

Comment

Lukashenka's attempt to engage the Vatican in the negotiation process between Minsk and Brussels, first of all, implies the unwillingness of the Belarusian regime to fulfill the EU preconditions for normalization of relations. Therefore, the authorities propose to shift the Belarus-EU interstate dialogue to a new, inter-church level.

Secondly, Lukashenka made an allusion to a possible visit of the Pope to Belarus, which gives away a messianic desire of the Belarusian authorities to play a key role in the Eastern European region. If true, for instance, Belarus will be able to organize a historic meeting of representatives of the Catholic and the Orthodox churches in the country. President Lukashenka has more than once talked about his desire to carry out such a civilizing mission and, apparently, did not part with this idea.

However, due to the low level of trust in the relations between the Belarusian government and the Catholic Church, as well as between the leadership of the neighboring countries, Russia and Poland in particular, this scenario is hardly probable. Therefore, the proposal made to the Holy See to mediate the Minsk-Brussels relations primarily demonstrates acute policy deficiency in the Presidential Administration.

Lukashenka's milieu considers the Catholic Church as an alibi, which Minsk needs in the given circumstances to manipulate the political demands of the EU. In the best case scenario, the process of restoring the trust between the Vatican and Moscow will be mediated by Belarus. Such disproportionate geopolitical ambitions are rather common for Lukashenka's policy, but in this particular case, they imply that in the confrontation with the West, the resources of Belarus are almost exhausted.

Source: ***Solidarity with Belarus Information Office***

May 3, 2012

Antoni Dziemianko is appointed as the bishop of Pinsk diocese

On the 3rd of May, 2012, there was announced the decision of Pope Benedict XVI in Pinsk. The decision is the following – to appoint Antoni Dziemianko as the bishop of Pinsk diocese and to relieve him of the position of the executive bishop of Minsk-Mahilioŭ diocese.

Antoni Dziemianko was born on January 1, 1960 in the village of Zabroddzie of the parish of Dzieraŭnaja, the archdiocese of Minsk-Mahilioŭ. After finishing school he got from state authorities the permission to entry the seminary of Riga. His priestly formation took place under the spiritual direction of Doctor of Theology Prelate Vaclaŭ Piantkoŭski, Vicar General of the diocese of Pinsk at that time. On October 28, 1980, Antoni Dziemianko was ordained priest. Till April 26, 1985 he had no permission from the state authorities for priestly service and worked as sacristan and organist. From 1984 till 1998 he worked as dean in Navahradak. In 1992 he began his studies at the Institute of Family of the Catholic Theological Academy in Warsaw, which he graduated from in 1996 taking his degree of Master of Theology.

On July 4, 1998 Antoni Dziemianko was nominated Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese of Hrodna by the decree of the Holy Father John Paul II. The consecration carried out by Kazimierz Cardinal Świątek took place on the 29th of September 1998. From 1998 till 2004 Bishop Antoni Dziemianko was Vicar General of the diocese, dean of the cathedral parish and rector of the Major Seminary in Hrodna. He was elected Secretary General of the Conference of Catholic Bishops in Belarus, head of the Councils for Liturgy, Family and Charity Activity.

On December 14, 2004 Pope John Paul II appointed His Excellence Antoni Dziemianko, who performed the functions of the Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese of Hrodna, to the post of Auxiliary Bishop of the archdiocese of Minsk-Mahilioŭ.

On the 14th of June 2006 the Holy Father Benedict XVI nominated His Excellence Antoni Dziemianko as Apostolic Administrator sede vacante et ad nutum Sanctae Sedis of Minsk-Mahilioŭ. September 21, 2007 — released from duties of the Apostolic Administrator sede vacante and ad nutum Sanctae Sedis of the diocese of Minsk-Mahilioŭ. Appointed auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Minsk-Mahilioŭ. At present, holds the position of the Vicar General of the archdiocese of Minsk-Mahilioŭ.

Source: ***Catholic.by***

May 5, 2012

Bilingual Polish-Belarusian Signs Demolished in Poland

Police is looking for vandals who have defaced 12 bilingual Polish-Belarusian signs with names of localities in the municipality of Orla (Podlaskie Voivodeship of Poland.). The voivode of the Podlaskie, mayor of the Bielsk county, as well as the mayor of the Orla municipality have condemned in a joint stament this "action of vandalism."

The devastation in Orla was another manifestation of ultra-nationalism, directed against national minorities that took place in the Podlaskie in last several months.. In 2011 unknown perpetrators have defaced bilingual Polish-Lithuanian signs in the community of Punsk. Monuments, erected in memory of Jews murdered in Jedwabne have been also devastated.

According to Orla's mayor, Piotr Selwesiuk, unknown perpetrators have sprayed over with green paint Belarusian-language names on directional road signs on the district highway No. 66, and on the highway between Bielsk and Hajnówka/ Hajnaŭka. The bilingual Polish and Belarusian information on these signs indicated the names of localities, as well as the distance to them.

The authorities, both on the Voivodeship and self-government level, have expressed their regrets: "Inhabitants of the Podlaskie Voivodeship are proud of our region's multi-cultural nature and good relations with all national, ethnic and religious

minorities, residing here. The act of vandalism that occurred in Orla deserves absolute condemnation by our entire society,"
Source: Polish Press Agency

May 5, 2012

Ashdod to name a square after Yanka Kupala

A square in the Israeli city of Ashdod will be named after a Belarusian poet Yanka Kupala, BelTA learnt from the Belarusian Embassy in Israel.

The decision to name the square after Yanka Kupala was made by the municipal authorities of Ashdod after a relevant proposal had been put forward by the Belarusian Embassy in Israel and the All-Israel Association of Belarusian Immigrants. "The decision acknowledges the unique history of good relations of Belarusians and the Jewish community and is timed to the forthcoming 130th anniversary of the Belarusian poet," the Embassy said.

Ashdod is the sixth biggest city in Israel located on the Mediterranean coast. Ashdod has a population of about 210,000. The city has one of the biggest Belarusian communities in Israel.

Ashdod is a major industrial and trading center. It has Israel's largest port accounting for 60% of the country's imported goods. Ashdod has recently become a twin-town of Brest.

Source: ***BelTA***

May 7, 2012

Belarus' forex reserves up 0.5% since 1 January 2012

According to the National Bank, since the beginning of the year Belarus' gold and foreign exchange reserves increased by $40.8 million, or 0.5%, from $7915,9 million as of 1 January to $7956,7 million as of 1 May in IMF terms, BelTA learnt from the Information Office of the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus.

In national terms the gold and foreign exchange reserves amounted to $9,510.2 million, up $123 million since 1 January 2012, or by 1.3%.

However, in April, for the first time this year, the gold and forex reserves of Belarus declined by 1.6%, or $128.5 million in IMF terms. According to the National Bank, the decline was due to the repayment of the country's internal and external obligations in foreign currency. The obligations of the National Bank worth more than $400 million were fulfilled ahead of schedule.

Belarus' gold and foreign currency reserves in IMF terms are projected to make up $7.92 -8.33 billion as of 1 January 2013, the National Bank informs.

Source: ***BelTA***

May 8, 2012

Lukashenka says Belarus not going to choose between West and East

Belarus is not going to choose between the Eastern and Western vectors, Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka said Tuesday in his traditional speech to the people and parliament.

Lukashenka stressed that Belarus and the West should settle their differences through a dialogue instead of sanctions and prohibitions. "The policy of sanctions is a mistake primarily because it is useless and lacks results", he added.

According to him, Belarus feels no animosity towards either the European Union or the United States. "Belarus is not hostile either to the European Union, or to the United States, because we look at what unites, not splits us in the first place. We are looking ahead into one future," the Belarusian President said.

Lukashenka said that the European Union is the most important vector for Belarus. "The EU is number one partner for us as far as export is concerned and number two partner after Russia as far as the overall trade turnover is concerned", he added.

"It is in the country's strategic interests to see the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Community as something that is not opposed to one another, and as something that will unite, not divide the continent," Lukashenka said.

The Belarusian president also said that Belarus had advanced the idea of "an integration of the integrated systems," and its goal is to form a common economic space from Lisbon to the Far East".

Source: ***Xinhua***

May 16, 2012

One-Third of Belarus – Non-Users of Internet

January 1, 2012, the number of subscribers and users of the Internet reached 6.8 million in Belarus, including individuals - 6.1 million out of 9.5 million residents. This was sated by press-secretary of the National Statistics Committee Elena Kondratenko. The number of subscribers and Internet users per 1 thousand people reached 719 by January 1, 2012 (year-end growth of 25.5%).

The capacity of external channels of Internet access totsled 200 Gb/s at the beginning of the year. Thus, it has increased almost three-fold for the year. The number of subscribers and users of wireless Internet access was 4.5 million (an increase of 34.2%). In general, the number broadband subscribers (fixed and wireless) made up 57.4% among the subscribers and users of Internet, BelTA_informs.

January 1, 97.4% of surveyed organizations used personal computers in their work. However, 94.6% had an access to the Internet, while e-mail services were used by 93.1%. Of the total number of employees of organizations, using personal computers, 46.2% were working on a PC with internet access.

As for organizations, the most common Internet access is fixed broadband (84%), followed by dial-up (29.5%) and wireless (17.6%). Only 18.1% of the surveyed organizations had an access the Intranet, while 5.9% - extranet.

Less than half of Belarusian families have computers

Percentage of households with personal computers was 46.4%, while those with access to the Internet from a home PC - 40.3%.

39.6% of the population used Internet services at the beginning of 2012, while 34.7% of them – used it at home, 3.1% - place of work (study), 0.3% - in an Internet cafe (club), at post offices and 0.4% - at friends and relatives' place.

January 1, 2012, the total number of subscribers of cellular mobile telecommunication amounted to 10.7 million, an increase for the year amounted to 362 thousand subscribers. It reached 98.1% of the country with a population of 99.7%. 1 thousand of Belarusians account for 1130 mobile phones.

Source: ***Telegraf.by***

May 17, 2012

Belarus calls Russia its major defense partner

Russia remains Belarus' major strategic partner in the defense area, Belarusian Defense Industries Committee Deputy Chairman Ihar Bykau said on Wednesday.

Belarus and Russia have intensified their efforts to create an efficient cooperation mechanism in recent years, Bykov said at the Belarus-Russia conference on military and defense cooperation in Minsk.

The defense industries of Russia and Belarus are well-arranged and cooperation-oriented, said the official.

He noted that about 280 Russian companies supply materials and component parts to the Minsk Wheeled Tractor Plant. “The plant has developed and introduced fourth-generation vehicles for various applications. Iskander mobile theater ballistic missile systems and the Uragan-1M multiple artillery rocket systems are mounted on Belarus-made frames,” he added.

According to Bykau, the upgrade of arms and military hardware is another promising area for future cooperation. He also spoke highly of Russia’s great potential in upgrading and renovating arms and military hardware.

“A harmonized defense policy will contribute to establishing a single defense space, enhancing defense capacities of the two countries and strengthening our overall security,” Bykau said.

Source: ***Xinhua***

May 18, 2012

IMF suggests Belarus continue tough monetary policy

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has advised Belarus to continue the tough monetary management policy to slow down high-flying inflation in the country, said a local media report published on Thursday.

The IMF representative office in Belarus said the IMF welcomed the recovery of the Belarusian economy after a crisis in 2011 thanks to implementation of a raft of measures including the unification of currency exchange rates, introduction of flexible exchange rates and tightening of monetary management, which have allowed revival of the currency market, reduction of inflation and the current account deficit, along with an increase of exchange reserves.

The IMF also recommended Belarusian government to continue focusing efforts on consolidating external and internal stability, and on pursuing structural reforms, while suggesting that the policy be accompanied by maintaining the flexible exchange rate and reliable reserves meant to protect the economy from external shocks.

Belarus hopes to borrow 3.5 billion U.S. dollars from the IMF to refinance its existing debt, according to the report.

The external debt of Belarus has surged to 61.4 percent of gross domestic product last year from 25 percent in 2008, said the IMF. The lender predicts that the country’s debt relative to economic output will “only gradually” drop to 56 percent of gross domestic product by the end of 2017.

Source: ***Xinhua***

May 18, 2012

Rene Fasel: By relocating the IIHF World Championship from Minsk we will punish innocent people

IIHF President Rene Fasel opened the 2012 IIHF Annual Congress in Helsinki and spoke against the relocation of the 2014 IIHF World Championship from Minsk, reads the IIHF website.

“By not going there, I believe that we would be punishing the wrong people, the Belarusian fans, other fans, and the athletes. I was also encouraged by two editorial columns in two of Sweden’s biggest newspapers during the first week of the World Championships where both said the same: Sport should not be used as a spearhead for political causes,” Mr Rene Fasel said.

While politics very often is confrontational and divisive, sports should stand for reconciliation and opening of new frontiers. Sport has in fact a history of accomplishing things where politics failed, he noted.

“Recall that in the ‘70s it was a series of ping-pong matches that defrosted the relationships between the USA and China. Rugby has done more than any political action to reconcile the people in South Africa after the dark period of apartheid. And in our sport, we would be deprived of maybe the greatest series ever played – the 1972 Summit Series between Canada and the Soviet Union – if those two countries would be guided by their ideological differences, rather than by the desire to compete on ice to see who the best is in hockey, Mr Rene Fasel said.

“Boycotts of sport events is against the fundamental idea of sports and it devalues the idea of sport. This is our opinion,” said the IIHF President.

Source: ***BelTA***

June 7, 2012

National Relic Returned to Belarus

Belarus’ national historical relic — the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Litva has been festively presented on June 7, 2012 in Miensk, to be transferred to Mahilioŭ.

The Mahilioŭ History Museum has raised the $45,000 necessary to acquire a copy of the 1588 Statute from a private collector in Moscow. who has put it up for sale on an auction website.

First to learn about this was Andrej Radkoŭ, a Belarusian history student. who brought this information to the attention of the Mahilioŭ History Museum

On May 14, the museum launched a fundraising campaign to purchase the unique document in the Old Belarusian language

Online trading company Alpari donated $30,000 for buying the document and 100,000 rubles ($3,000) was provided by Pavel Berahovich, a Belarusian living in Russia, Aliaksei Batsiukou, director of the Mahilioŭ History Museum, told BelaPAN.

A deposit amounting to 10 percent of the price asked by the collector was paid by an anonymous Mahilioŭ businessman, said Mr. Baciukoŭ, adding that 76 million rubels ($9,000) had come from other individuals.

The Mahilioŭ History Museum will hold a special ceremony to unveil the new exhibit, he said.

The statute, compiled and printed in 1588 by the prominent statesman Leŭ Sapieha (1557-1633) at his own expense, was reprinted twice in the Old Belarusian language in the late 1590s and came out in Polish in the early 1600s. “It is the Belarusian-language book that we are interested in,” Mr. Baciukoŭ said earlier. “Belarus does not have any copies.”

The Statute was essentially a medieval version of the Constitution, the most progressive for its times. It exerted great influence on Litva’s legal system, as well as on that of Litva’s neighbors.

Sources: ***BelaPAN, Charter 97 Press Center***

THOUGHTS & OBSERVATIONS

Execution of Accused Minsk Bombers: Troubling Questions Remain

By David Marples

The execution of two alleged Minsk subway bombers in mid-March in Belarus has elicited an angry outcry, particularly from the European Union and Amnesty International. Belarusian president Aliaksandr Lukashenka has stated that while he sympathizes with the victims' families, the evidence provided against the two perpetrators was overwhelming. He had no choice but to order their immediate execution.

Why have these deaths brought such a response? Was the Belarusian regime not simply defending itself against further terrorist attacks?

That is the perspective at least of Russian analyst Yulia Latynina, who writes in *The Moscow Times* (21 March) that the Belarusian security services responded to the explosion at the busy Kastrichnitskaya (October) metro station in Minsk on 11 April 2011, which killed 15 people an injured over 300 others, "like a well-oiled and perfectly tuned machine" and—as if one well-worn cliché was insufficient—"moved heaven and earth" to ascertain the culprit. She points out also that they interrogated 854 witnesses, looked through 84,000 mobile phone accounts, and carried out 509 searches. Fingerprint evidence suggested that one of the accused was in the vicinity of the explosion site. When Judge Aliaksandr Fedortsou announced the verdict, which he did in full, it ran to 114 pages. Thus the authorities could hardly be accused of a lack of thoroughness.

And yet, as indicated inter alia by the reliable surveys of the National Institute for Social-Economic and Political Research, over 60% of Belarusian residents doubt the validity of the verdict (cited by charter97.org, 18 March), a death sentence first announced last November against two men born in 1986 from Vitsebsk: Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavaliou (because of the similarity of their surnames we will refer them hereafter as Dzmitry and Uladizislau). The chair of the UN Human Rights Committee, Zonke Zanele Majodina, declared that "Belarus has committed a grave breach of its legal obligations by executing Mr. [Uladzislau] Kovalev," Appeals not to implement the death sentence arrived from Catherine Ashton, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany (charter97.org, 19 March and 20 March).

Without doubt some of the concern from the Europeans pertained to the practice of the death penalty and it has been pointed out repeatedly in recent days that Belarus is the only country in Europe to retain it. That is a separate question, however, and does not detract from the fact that many observers and analysts, like most Belarusians, believe that much about the investigation and trial of the two men was flawed and suspicious, not least because of the events timing in the midst of a bitter political crisis that followed the presidential elections of December 2010, which resulted in over 700 arrests in Independence Square and the incarceration of seven of the nine presidential candidates, one of which, Mikalay Statkevich, remains in jail.



Uladzislau Kavaliou, Dzmitry Kanavalau

But returning to 11 April 2011, the explosion occurred around 6pm at the busiest metro station in Minsk. The bomb was a crude one of nails and ball-bearings and evidently was contained in a bag left on a bench on the main platform. Within less than two hours, the president himself appeared at the disaster site accompanied by his six-year old son Mikalay (better known as Kolya). While Lukashenka frequently brings his son to state occasions and on foreign trips, many questioned the decision to bring the young boy to the metro station. What if there had been a second bomb? Recently in an interview with the Russia Today network that was also run by Belarus 1 TV station, the president stated that this was his personal decision and "his cross" (Belapan, 22 March). It would have been unusual, however, if more cynical critics did not reach a different conclusion, namely that he knew full well that there would not be a second bomb.

When the trial began in September 2011, the demeanor of the two accused, both of which worked at a factory providing spare parts for tractors, was quite different: Dzmitry was subdued and listless; Uladzislau more defiant and supported by family members, most notably his mother. He retracted his guilty plea, which he claimed had been given under duress from the militia (eastbook.eu, 20 Sept). Dzmitry had confessed to the bombing, but refused to make any statement in court. He was also accused of being the perpetrator of the hitherto unsolved terrorist bomb on 3 July 2008 in Minsk, an occasion at which Lukashenka was present to celebrate the national holiday; as well as a bomb attack in Vitsebsk in September 2005. In both these earlier attacks, there were no deaths, but total injuries exceeded 100. In each case, the prosecution argued, Uladzislau was the accomplice. But there were no obvious motives for the crimes, and Russia's FSB, which also conducted an analysis of the crime scene, noted that a man shown on footage of security cameras could not be identified as Dzmitry (RFE/RL, 30 Nov).

Aleh Hruzdzilovich, a correspondent for the RFE/RL Belarusian Service, who has written a book about the trial, attended every session in the assembly hall of the Palace of Justice. He commented that the setting was more appropriate for concerts than trials. An iron cage, to which the defendants were brought, stood on the stage. Those

in the hall were deprived of Internet connections and the judge expressly banned cameras. Yet state media outlets could have balcony seats with Wi-Fi access and the sentencing was shown on state television, despite the ban. Hruzdzilovich has serious doubts whether the sentence to Uladzislau was merited (RFE/RL, 20 March). On 30 November, the two men received death sentences.

Before the sentences could be carried out, Uladzislau's mother, Lubou Kavaliova mounted a campaign to save the life of her son. Human rights activists, journalists, and well-known European politicians were responsive, not necessarily because they considered Uladzislau innocent, but because they were not convinced of his guilt (charter97.org, 18 March). He had heard sounds from Dzmitry's cell that indicated his friend was being severely beaten, which raised doubts about the confession to the crime (Financial Times, 19 March). Other reports suggest that both men were beaten (amnesty.org, 19 March). Yet there are many other imponderables in this case.

First, the legendary efficiency of the security services had not been in evidence after the previous bombings of 2005 and 2008, despite determined efforts. If Dzmitry and Uladzislau were guilty of those offenses, they would have been teenagers at the time of the Vitsebsk event. How could the investigators solve one case in less than 48 hours, but fail to uncover the perpetrators of others six and three years earlier? The likelihood was that Dzmitry had confessed under duress. There is a significant difference also in an attempt to kill the president (which should obviously be condemned) and what was described as an effort to kill as many people as possible (RFE/RL, 30 Nov)—according to Latynina "the maniac detonated the bombs for fun" (Moscow Times, 21 March)

Second, those who observed photographs of the basement suite have noted it was inconceivable that this was the reported "bomb factory." There was no space for the assemblage of such devices and equipment. Third, a few days after the explosion, a report from the Chinese agency reported that five people had been arrested and three had already confessed (Xinhua, 15 April). There was no explanation of who the third person might be. By 20 April, several more opponents of Lukashenka were arrested, most of which were from Vitsebsk, including Volha Karach, editor of the opposition newspaper *Nash Dom.* Lukashenka ordered the KGB to detain and question, and not to pay attention to the "wails and groans of pathetic Westerners" (Al Jazeera, 12 April). Thus the implication was clear: the terrorist attack was linked to the opposition (and possibly the West) and the security forces should start a crackdown.

Third, and moving ahead to March 2012, despite the various appeals, the sentences were carried out rapidly with shots to the back of the head, sometime between 11 and 16 March. The bodies were disposed of in unknown graves and all evidence gathered for the trial destroyed. There can be no future inquiries into this case. On 17 March, the executions were reported on state television. On this same day Lubou Kavaliova received an official letter informing her of Uladzislau's execution. Dzmitry's death was confirmed by the television announcement. There has been no explanation for the haste. Earlier executions have taken place more than two years after the judge gave the verdict of the death penalty.

Lastly, the Stalinist-style show trial presented no physical evidence that definitively links the two perpetrators to the crime and no motives for the bombing. Belarus is not a terrorist site. It has a homogenous population and it has not taken part in wars in the Caucasus, Iran, or Afghanistan. After the explosion of April 2011, the authorities policed the Internet, targeting people who expressed support for the conspiracy theory implicating either Lukashenka, or the security services, or both. Arrests of known activists continued for most of that year. Thus the terrorist attack was a convenient occasion for a crackdown.

We may never know whether Dzmitry and Uladzislau were innocent or guilty. But their hasty executions were warranted neither by the evidence provided publicly nor from a humanitarian perspective. Lukashenka informed Russia television viewers that he speaks to God every day. One can only wonder what he says to Him.

Stefan Liebich: Opening Gates for Belarusians From the German Side Would Help Enormously

The Belarus-EU relations reached their lowest point ever by the end of February 2012, when the EU countries have recalled their ambassadors from Minsk. The very development of this situation made it clear that the previous EU strategy towards Belarus has failed and requires serious reframing. The fact is that the EU has to deal with an authoritarian regime led by Lukašenka who despite considerable economic hardships in the country still enjoys a high degree of popularity among Belarus' citizens. Expanding the black lists of Belarus' officials and tycoons banned from entering the EU, targeted economic sanctions and future perspectives of the Belarus-EU dialogue elicited different opinions both within the Belarusian society and among foreign politicians and analysts.

Belarusian Review asked ***Stefan Liebich*** *who represents the Left Party (Die Linke) in the German Bundestag's Committee on Foreign Affairs to provide his view on the current developments of Belarus-EU relations and Germany's role in it.*

Belarusian Review: *Belarus is the only country in Europe implementing capital punishment. Even though the death penalty is used in exceptional cases, the recent execution of Uladzislaŭ Kavalioŭ stirred up the Belarusian society. The Belarusian government refers to results of the 1996 referendum, when the majority opted to preserve the death penalty. It seems that any changes of this policy may be sanctioned only by the authorities. What is the scope of the EU influence (if any) on the Belarusian authorities in this issue and how do you evaluate the fairness and objectivity of the trial of alleged perpetrators of the terrorist attack in the Minsk metro on 11 April 2011?*

Stefan Liebich: The Left Party (Die Linke) as well as all other parties in the Bundestag denounces the capital

punishment. We would very much welcome if the Belarusian government would finally end this cruel type of punishment. In this matter the EU Member States speak in one voice. We have serious doubts whether the trial procedure against the alleged perpetrators of the terrorist attack in the Minsk metro complied with the rule of law criteria. However, regardless of this, we find the enforcement of death sentence as wrong since we totally reject it per se.

BR: *Many analysts see the return of the EU ambassadors to Belarus as either another EU's political defeat or as a certain intermediate compromise between Minsk and Brussels. What is your opinion on this Belarus-EU "diplomatic war" and could there be any winners in this "war" at all?*

SL: I believe that isolating Belarus diplomatically is not a correct solution. With all the necessary and legitimate criticisms it should always be possible to maintain a dialogue with each other. An escalation, which followed the recalling of EU Ambassadors, was not a correct way. It does not weaken criticism of the Lukašenka government; in the past, for example during the Cold War, it was possible to maintain mutual diplomatic contacts. Under the conditions of current conflicts one should not exceed these limits either.

BR: *One of the most significant obstacles for Belarusians in getting acquainted with the EU is the visa requirement – visas are quite expensive and their issuance is accompanied by much bureaucracy. A possibility of uncomplicated travelling to the EU would allow Belarusians to see it with their own eyes and facilitate contacts between people. What are the steps that could be undertaken by Germany to facilitate this process and is there a will among the country's different political groups to do so?*

SL: Opening gates from the German side would help enormously. I have also brought up this policy in the German Bundestag. Therefore the Left Party (Die Linke) advocates in the Parliament the simplification of the visa procedure and reducing its costs. While among the MPs who specialize in foreign affairs this view is basically shared regardless of their parliamentary party adherence, the interal affairs politicians from the CDU/CSU impede reaching this decision. They argue that it would open the doors for the criminality. This is nonsense since all those who would come to pursue their criminal interests do it already now. The Federal Republic of Germany thus complicates the access to the European Union for those who would like to come in good faith. I very much hope that the resistance of this small group of departmental politicians in the Bundestag can soon be overcome.

Interview conducted by Kirył Kaścian

Return of EU Ambassadors To Minsk

By David Marples

The release of two political prisoners over the Orthodox Easter weekend, followed by the gradual return of the European Union ambassadors to Minsk (they departed en masse on February 28) has prompted supposition about the effectiveness of the relatively harsh sanctions against the Belarusian regime. Thus the "concession" on the part of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to release Andrei Sannikau and Dzmitry Bandarenka could be perceived as a direct result of the firm stance taken by the EU. And indeed sanctions may have played some role. But it is doubtful that the Belarusian president took the step solely because of EU pressure. In fact, the move was carefully calculated and was even to some extent predictable.

The president explained it as follows: he released the two prisoners on April 14 because they had both asked for pardons. One was demonstrably sick (Bandarenka), while the other has a young son and thus his release served as an act of compassion to allow the family to be reunited over the Easter weekend. He also explained in an interview that he had little sympathy for them in terms of their past behavior and that if Sannikau chose "to blabber" he would quickly find himself detained once again (Democraticbelarus.eu, Apr 23). It is harder to explain the gap between the requests for a pardon – made initially on November 20 in the case of Sannikau (Belsat TV, April 17) – and the release, and here the logical deduction is that the timing was indeed chosen to coincide with the demands of the EU. But the step was carefully considered and not part of a general plan to release all remaining political detainees. In short, the President agreed to the release but waited for the appropriate moment to put it into effect.

Subsequently, a request by Christian Democratic Party co-leader Pavel Sevyarynets for early release from his penal colony was brusquely rejected, precisely because he had not acknowledged his guilt (Narodnaya Volya, April 27). Likewise it seems that other prisoners who have not responded to state brutality and pressure, like the remaining presidential candidate Mikalay Statkevich or youth leader Dzmitry Dashkevich, are unlikely to be set free until they do so. The more high profile Ales Byalatsky, head of Vyasna, ostensibly has more hope of early release because he is a better "bargaining chip" for the authorities, providing hope that there will be some concession in return (an easing of sanctions, reduction of the travel ban list, etc.).

The personal interest of Lukashenka in the cases of individual prisoners is increasingly apparent. The task of the KGB is first and foremost to "break" the prisoners, by any means, including torture and threats to family members, isolation or putting them in rooms with security leaders known for their harsh interrogation techniques. Sannikau indicated to his wife last January that he could be "killed at any time" (RFE/RL Belarus Service, January 25). Once broken, the initial task is to persuade the prisoner to ask the President for a pardon, essentially an admission of guilt, in which case the subject is dependent on the Belarusian leader even when released from captivity and thereby nullified or weakened as a political force. The admission of guilt is critical – even if the prisoner is released, and for whatever reason. That is why the EU's demand for the full release of all prisoners unconditionally is quietly ignored.

From the Belarusian perspective, this is a winnable game of political chess in which the moves of the opponent are all too predictable because they are based on moral standards, but which are largely unrecognized in this post-Soviet country. Upon his release, Sannikau stated: "I think we are witnessing a game" (RFE/RL Belarusian Service, April 15). The diminishing support for EU policy within Belarus is reflected in the March 2012 IISEPs poll that showed a sudden rise in the number of respondents who supported integration of their country with Russia (45.3 percent), with 35.3 percent opposed to unification (Angus Reid Global Monitor, April 14). The prestige of the EU, correspondingly, has fallen.

There may be several reasons for this latest development, of which the following should be considered most likely. First, diplomatic attempts to punish Belarus by the departure of the 27 EU ambassadors – Lukashenka asked only the Polish ambassador and EU delegate in Minsk to return to their capitals – have not worked. The ambassadors, after all, represent their countries; they do not pay salaries or pensions or supply goods to stores. The spat is unrelated to the direct concerns of the population. It seems moreover like an overreaction, particularly when one compares the response to events in other Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, such as Ukraine where the regime has jailed several opposition leaders but was still allowed to initial an Association Agreement with the EU on March 30 (RIA Novosti, March 30). Another EaP member, Azerbaijan, is currently discussing an associative agreement with the EU despite a record on human rights considerably worse than that of Belarus (http://www.hrw.org/europecentral-asia/azerbaijan).

Second, the EU has offered Belarus very little in terms of material incentives while demanding that the regime democratize. Increasingly, therefore, the average resident is likely to deduce that even a bad deal with Russia is preferable to no deal at all with the EU. The Russians have various integrationist institutions in place and plainly they would like to embrace Belarus. In fact the Eurasian Economic Community has claimed that sanctions against Belarus harm the business interests of all members of the association (BD Delovaya Gazeta, April 26). By contrast the financial inducements of the Eastern Partnership hardly suggest that Brussels is genuinely interested in Minsk as a neighbor or prospective partner. Of the total of $2.5 billion designated for 2011-2013 for a variety of projects, none is destined for Belarus because no Memorandum of Understanding has been signed to date with Minsk (http://www.easternpartnership.org/content/eastern-partnership-funds).

In turn, the President gains popularity by focusing on the "duplicity" of the policies developed by Brussels and attributing economic failures to vindictive maneuvers made in foreign capitals. It is a simple matter to link devaluations of currency and other problems to enhanced sanctions against Belarusian companies. It is also a logical stance to point out the inconsistencies in EU treatment of EaP member states. Belarus, declares Lukashenka, is ready to sit down and discuss any issue with the EU as long as there is not any form of pressure (Telegraf.by, April 26). Until then, he will continue the chess game, which the EU seems only too willing to play, thereby agreeing implicitly that political prisoners are no more than pawns to be sacrificed or saved. From Brussels's perspective, while everyone should be happy to see Andrei Sannikau and Dzmitry Bandarenka free, there should be no self-delusion as to why it has occurred.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 9 Issue: 82

Church and Politics in Belarus

By Pavel Usov

One of more widespread statements by representatives of both the Orthodox as well as the Catholic churches is the following: " church is beyond politics and is not engaged in politics." Of course this attitude is by far not always realized in practice. Yet, even if the church always and everywhere follows this given principle, it does not at all mean that the ruling elite will stop using the church for political objectives. Especially, if the church happens to exist in conditions of an authoritarian regime, where any social institution may function only when it submits , or in the best case scenario, does not oppose the interests of the ruling power. Essentially, even the church's silence concerning the politically significant issues or events — that is already politics. If there are political prisoners in a country, human rights are violated, and the church is protected by its silence — that means that it, despite its own statements on non-intervention in politics, remains lenient toward these violations and is already involved in politics.

No matter how much the clergy would like to place the church above mundane worries, it is a part of a social organism, and consequently, it cannot remain outside of processes taking place in the society and the state.

The strongest politicization of the church is taking place in nondemocratic regimes, where practically everything is tied to politics. Of course, there exist serious distinctions in the church's place and role in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes.

In totalitarian communist regimes, where religion contradicted the materialist views of ideology, the church was subject to persecution and actually was destroyed, since it represented a threat to the ideological monolith.

In authoritarian regimes with the absence of a huge apparatus for mobilizing the society , and of a single ideological concept, the Church often becomes an instrument for legitimizing the reegime, especially, if the society is religious. This, for instance, happened in Portugal during the rule of Salazar, in Frankist Spain, and in Greece during the dictatorship of the "black colonels."

At the same time, the legitimacy of a nondemocratic regime, being exclusively dependent on the support of other social institutions, makes the given regime very vulnerable. The Church (mainly, the Catholic Church) has frequently become an important mechanism for the political transformation of authoritarian systems, since it can not only deprive the regime of its support, but also mobilize the society to oppose the dictatorship. Thanks to the principled position of the Catholic Church at the end of 1980's, change was made possible in Central and South America, and in Eastern Europe.

The Belarusian authoritarian regime is no exception. The churches, Orthodox and Catholic, regardless of their own wishes, perform concrete political functions.

The Orthodox Church is one of the instruments for legitimizing the political regime, and also participates in creating Lukashenka's positive image.

It is sufficient to state that, according to statistics in Belarus, about 60% of the population considers itself Orthodox. Without a doubt, the Church enjoys definite authority and exerts influence over society. If the Orthodox Church were to assume a critical position toward the political regime, it would result a very serious blow to the authoritarian system and Lukashenka's image

I don't exclude the possibility, that if in the future, for instance, Moscow were to come up with serious plans to replace Lukashenka, the Orthodox Church would play an important role in this development. However, so far the Orthodox Church is on the government's side and represents one component of the official ideology. Lukashenka has spoken many times spoke on the importance of the Orthodox Church; he tries to participate in all important religious rituals that would emphasize his closeness to the Orthodox Church. " The Church today occupies a very good position - it supports the stability of our state. It works sincerely for our state. (" Beyond the protocol. With the protocol. The president socializes with young fellow citizens. " *Belgazeta*, 18.02.2008. No. 7). In its turn, the Orthodox Church receives administrative and financial support from the state.

The Catholic Church exists under much less favorable conditions. Even if it's not subject to open persecution, it is nevertheless regarded by authorities as an alien (hostile) institution, rather than as an ally supporting the regime. Lukashenka's relationship to the Catholic Church is purely functional (like that toward western businessmen or the opposition) :if the church wants to carry out its activities in Belarus, it must be loyal to the regime, and play according to the rules fixed by the authorities. Otherwise, the authorities may make conditions unbearable for the Church by prohibiting entrance to Catholic clergymen, or deporting those who already work in Belarus - which has been demonstrated many times.

This is why Lukashenka does not hesitate to make political demands on representatives of the Catholic Church, thus implementing political blackmail. In principle, the relationship of Belarus' authorities with the churches is a reflection of its relationship with the European Union and Russia. While in his relationship with the West Lukashenka may afford some impudent tricks, in his relationship with Russia he is more restrained.

In its turn, although the Catholic Church does not openly support the regime's policies as the Orthodox Church does, nevertheless it tries not to irritate Lukashenka by issuing critical remarks on the general situation in Belarus and preserves "diplomatic silence."

However, the "diplomatic silence" of the Catholic church within the country is not likely to grow into active lobbying of the regime's interests on the international scene, even if the authorities increase their pressure on the church.The Catholic Church will not begin lobbying for Lukashenka due to several reasons:

First, the political influence of the Catholic church in today's Europe is weak. On one hand , this weakness is because Catholicism is not a dominant denomination, on the other hand the Vatican long ago ceased to be both spiritual and political authority for secular European society.

Second, advancing the interests of a political regime, that harshly suppresses human rights and freedoms, would produce bewilderment in democratic Europe, and would negatively affect the image of the Catholic Church, rather than help in warming relations between Belarus and the European Union. In addition, Belarus continues to implement the death penalty, which contradicts the proper principles of the Catholic Church.

Third, some Catholic countries, like, for instance Poland and Lithuania, where the Catholic church was persecuted and repressed during the communist dictatorship, would hardly approve Vatican's initiative to defend the Belarusian dictator.

Therefore Lukashenka's attempts to use the Catholic church as his advocate in the West will not bring about realistic political results.

And, when looking for allies/support for his political course, Lukashenka's hopes will remain futile, since he cannot count on the Catholic church ...

Pavel Usov is chairman of the board of the Belarusian Center for European Studies.

MEDIA WATCH

Press Review

Belarusian Activists: There is no Need to Form a New "Exile Government," since BNR Rada Already Exists

A number of Belarusian cultural leaders and politicians came out in support of an Open Lettter "Regarding the current Role of the BNR Rada." The letter is critical of the initiatives by some foreign politicians regarding the creation of a "Belarusian government in exile," concluding that such a representation has already existed for a long time: it is the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR is its acronym in Belarusian).

"The Open Letter takes issue with comments by foreign politicians that have appeared in the media, advocating the formation of a Belarusian Government in exile, whose tasks would be to represent and defend national interests of the Republic of Belarus outside the country. The current entities that are subordinate to the regime, neither represent nor defend Belarusian national interests. Accepting the fact that a citizen of any state has the right to his own view on what is taking place in Belarus, we also have the right to our own view regarding such comments. Outside initiatives concerning such an important and explicitely Belarusian issue seem to cast doubt on the ability of Belarusians themselves to decide their own fate. The situation in Belarus, however tense or controversial it might be, should nevertheless be resolved inside the country."

Regarding the external representation of Belarusian national interests , if one does not consider entities subordinate to the regime, then such a representation already exists, declare the authors of the Open Letter: it is the Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR).

"While the legitimacy of this representation may be questioned formally, its historical and moral legitimacy is unquestionable. It is the government of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, whose independence was declared in 1918, and whose representatives have been selflessly dedicating themselves all along to the advancement of Belarusian national interests, . First of all — freedom, independence, democracy. Many of them have paid the ultimate price — their lives."

"The current members of the BNR Rada have not been involved in everyday quarrels, including the intra-oppositional. Instead they have been defending the nonpartisan Belarusian interests" — declare the Belarusian activists, the authors of the Open Letter.

"They, like their predecessors, are worthy representatives of Belarusian democratic forces and of the civic society outside of Belarus. Therefore we consider appropriate not the creation of an additional "official" structure, founded on doubtful legitimacy, but rather the support of the activity of the BNR Rada in defense of Belarusian national interests."

Translation of the Open Letter posted on **www.Naviny.by**, on March 24, 2012

Book Review

The Past May not Return, yet It Must be Appreciated

By Leonid Smilovitsky

A review of the book by A. Rosenberg "Essays on the Jewish History of Towns and Shtetls of Belarus."

The book "Essays on the Jewish History of Towns and Shtetls of Belarus." by A. Rosenberg was published in Minsk at the end of last year. Because Judaica has thus far been absent as an independent trend of historical research in independent Belarus, Rosenberg's book has become a kind of 'popular reply" to this glaring injustice.

Of course, this book is by far not the first work dedicated to the contribution of Belarusian Jews in those two and a half centuries after the partition of the "Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth" in the 18th century, when numerous Jewish quahals (Jewish communes) became part of the Russian empire. The czarist authorities did everything possible to assimilate or "domesticate" them. However, the Jews continued enjoying wide autonomy, lived a full-blooded religious life, and proved their survivability and usefulness to their neighbors, the Belarusians. All attempts to cause a quarrel between the two nationalities were unsuccessful; which is why the pogroms of the end of 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries hardly affected this region. Blood libels and accusations of Jews spreading general drunkenness among Belarusian peasants (common in Russia and Ukraine) were not widespread in Belarus.

Alexander Rosenberg, a teacher from Orsha, has for many years meticulously collected everything that pertained to Jewish life in Belarus. In the footsteps of his research for the newspaper *Berega* (Riverbanks), he has published two dozen stories about the country's former towns and cities.

The book's main objective, as set by its author, is to show the spiritual component of the Jewish people as the foundation of its existence. According to Rosenberg's deep conviction, the endless revolutions, five-year plans, and religious and cultural reformations have brought nothing good to the Jewish people.

The author defines the genre of his work as "Essays." This definition beforehand safeguards him from possible reproaches by his critics concerning the construction of the composition, the book's structure, presentation of materials, and their analysis and treatment. The book is constructed in accordance with collected news items. This probably explains why it contains only 56 geographical names, where some time ago Jews constituted not only the majority of the population, but also brought deserved respect and fame to the place of their residence. These "mere" names amounted to 450 pages of text. Of course, it was not possible to embrace what is boundless.

As law-abiding citizens who paid taxes and performed military service, the Jews observed one of the Torah's most important commandments, according to which it is necessary to preserve loyalty to the people who gave them shelter. In addition, when revolutionary ferment engulfed the country, Jewish youth were in the first ranks of fighters against the autocracy (as *narodniki*, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Social-Democrats, members of the Bund, Bolsheviks, etc…). This was their reply to the government's policy of anti-Semitism in all its manifestations.

The book's historical framework encompasses the periods before and after 1917, the civil war, pre-war five-year plans, fascist invasion, the tragedy of the Holocaust, and the post-war period.

A. Rosenberg does not claim any intellectual discoveries. His objective is different — to collect under one cover information about where and how the Jews lived in Belarus, traces about which in the best case may be found in cemeteries (when they survived). On one hand, the book resembles a guidebook to the shtetls of the former Pale of Settlement, which included almost the entire North-Western region of the former Russian empire. And on the other hand, it resembles museum deposits, processed by the author for presenting to the readers' judgment.

Every district (municipal or regional) museum in Belarus possesses Jewish materials. However, how many of them are being displayed in exhibitions? There are no more prohibitions; however, the necessity of learning the history of Jewish neighbors has not been fully realized. Belarusian museum workers in Nesvizh, Novogrudok, Grodno, Ivye, Shklov, Cherven (Igumen) spoke up loudly about this issue. On the initiative of Jewish organizations, museums opened in Minsk, Pinsk, Vitebsk, Brest — all without support from the government's budget.

It is to the merit of Rosenberg's book, that it allows the reader an opportunity to look at past years' events through the eyes of the believing Jew. The author, being himself a person observing traditions, shows how and where Jews prayed. He answers the question, why isn't it possible to separate the everyday life of a religious Jew from the nation's history and traditions?

The book contains many unique photographs; regrettably, limited financial means haven't made it possible to present illustrations in accordance with necessary standards. This is especially regrettable at a time when the wonders of modern printing allow production of even a poor copy to be better than the original.

Of course, one may criticize the absence of scientific research framework in this book, the bibliographical list, personal and geographical directories. However, these criticisms do not change the essence of the matter. We are facing a great work by a man in love with the Jewish history of Belarus, who considers himself and his children an integral part of it.

It remains to hoped, that Alexander Rosenberg's deed will find its followers.

***Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky**, chief researcher*

The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University.

Quotes of Quarter

Former NHL player, currently member of the Europarliament, **PETER STASTNY** in his interview with Prague's *Lidove Noviny* :

”I do agree with Rene Fasel that sport and politics should not mix. However, **neither should sport become a propaganda tool of an abominable dictatorial regime”**

”What I am proposing is not boycotting the Championship, only transferring its venue from Belarus to a more democratic country.

It is a question of whether the Championship will help democracy in Belarus and its citizens, or be misused by a repressive regime — to convince the outside world that conditions in Belarus are OK. As long as innocent people are being imprisoned and tortured, while they go on living in an atmosphere of constant fear, things in Belarus are not OK.”

”However, should the human rights situation in Belarus improve, the Championship should be returned to Belarus as soon as possible.”



Peter Stastny

Another View

A quote from the address by Mr. **Stephan LIEBICH**, member of the German Parliament, delivered on May 5, 2012:

... Certainly, the criticism of Luukashenka's regime is shared by all of us here, and a loud signal, like this one, will definitely be heard. However, if we indeed mean it seriously and demand that the Ice Hockey World Championship be awarded to another country, then we should also consider refusing to hold the 2012 European Football Championship in Ukraine, and this year's Song Contest in Baku.

... And that today's Russia is not governed by ”flawless democrats,” has been by now probably noticed by the SPD. What about the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi?

... When considering all awarding criteria the concern for human rights should have been prioritized and taken into account beforehand, in order to avoid such discussions immediately before the implementation of a particular event.

.. We do not share your opinion that the proposal by the German Bundestag, addressed to the World IIHF, asking that the World Hockey Championship not be held in Belarus, is helping the people in Belarus.

Editor's note: Let me add a third view on the matter: my own.

As far as popular sports events are concerned, in some countries sports and politics practically always DO mix. To be more precise, in some countries it often becomes a contest between the sports' popularity (let's recall the ancient *bread and games* principle) and the concern for human rights. It is in human nature to prioritize the *games*, since human rights violations, while acknowledged, do not affect most people personally.

People's natural preference for *games* is being skillfuly manipulated by the world's repressive regimes - by misusing the sports'popularity as a propaganda tool, to fool the world into thinking that conditions in their countries are normal (OK).

In this contest, the concern for human rights has been long on the losing side.. Glaring examples include: Summer Olympic Games in 1936 in Berlin, and in 2008 in Peking; the 2014 Winter Olympics , definitely scheduled for Sochi in Russia.

Mr. Liebich points out that in these cases self-righteous human rights defenders allowed repressive regimes to gain the upper hand, which, in his opinion, justifies holding the 2014 World Ice Hockey Championship in Belarus. In my opinion , these are just examples of the world's tacit acknowledgement that in this popularity contest repressive regimes are bound to be successful .

Yet, in the past there have been several examples of outrage over human rights violations winning. Notable examples: moving the 1969 World Ice Hockey Championship from Prague, after the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia; on a more massive scale — the boy-

cott of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics by Western countries, as a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The latter measure required the involvement on a governmental level, and probably caused disappointment and disruption to the sport careers of innocent athletes on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Ideally, the balance in the contest between the sports popularity and and the concern for human rights would be best restored by sportsmen themselves (personally or through their representatives), by showing that they are not indifferent to the plight of their countrymen — in other words, that they consider human rights and justice more important than sports. This may require some sacrifices on their part, yet it would eventually be appreciated world-wide.

More SPORTS

Belarus has Reached Quarterfinals Of World Men's Handball Championship

The Belarusian national handball team has qualified for the quarterfinals of the World Men's Handball Championship scheduled for January 2013 in Spain.

On June 17, at the Minsk arena, Belarus has lost 24:25 to Slovakia in the return leg of the qualification match. However, despite this loss, the Belarusian national team headed by the Olympic champion Jury Šaucoŭ advanced to the final stage of the World Handball Championship, since it won the first leg a week ago in Slovakia, by score of 26:24 — and thus won the whole match in aggregate.

The second game in Minsk started for Belarusians dramatically — in front of more than 13,000 Belarusian spectators Slovakia led 9:3. However, the Belarusian national team managed to regain control of the game and made it 10:12 after the first half. In the second half Belarusians controlled the situation, and reached the necessary result.

This will be the second time the Belarusian national team participates in the final stage of World Men's Handball Championship. Its previous participation dates back to 1995 when the Belarusian national team led by the legendary coach Spartak Miranovič became 9th among 24 participants of the World handball forum in Iceland.

Source: *Nasa Niva*, June 18, 2012

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4 MEDALS for Belarus

at the European Track-and-Field Championships Helsinki, June 2012, as of June 30, 2012

2 SILVER medals:**:**
Alina Talaj , women's 110 m. hurdles., 12.91 sec
Volha Sudarava, women's long jump, 6, 71 m.

2 BRONZE medals:**:**.
Kaciaryna Paplauskaja, women's 110 m. hurdles., 12.97 sec
Natallia Usovič, women's 400m. run.,

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